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# PROGRESSIVE GROCCER

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With GST coming into force, a major rubicon has been crossed in the realm of tax administration. Initial reports suggest that it has been a smooth transition for the F&G industry, although there have been some minor hiccups here and there. But that is only to be expected whenever the old order gives way to the new. But before long, one hopes that the initial teething problems will be ironed out and all stakeholders will learn to jump through the GST hoops effortlessly.

As the most significant tax reform till date, GST has many benefits to offer. In one swift stroke, it has merged a large number of Central and State taxes (estimated at 25-30 per cent) into a single (reduced) tax under HSN Code & SA Code. Prior-stage taxes are now a thing of the past, paving the way for the creation of a Common National Market and better gains for both Central and State governments.

For the wholesalers and retailers, the new regime ushers in an era of greater transparency and tax compliance with the complete value chain tracked online. In the new scheme of things, changes are expected in the ways of doing business and margins are expected to grow thinner for both wholesalers and retailers. In this context, it is heartening to note that there have been ongoing discussions between producers and retailers to thrash out the nettlesome issues.

Most analysts concur that post-GST era will lead to more robust economic growth, which will boost consumer sentiment and market confidence. The uptick in business sentiment will boost the premiumisation trend. The profitability of entrepreneurs is also expected to grow once the challenges of complying with the new regulations are resolved.



**Amitabh Taneja**  
 Editor-in-Chief

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**“We are market leaders in finding the next trend-setting product.”**

Avni Biyani is the driving force behind Future Retail's premium lifestyle food superstore Foodhall. Since coming on board as Concept Head of the premium superstore chain, Avni has been successfully breaking new ground in gourmet food retailing in India.

In a chat, Avni talks of her chain's customer proposition and its market positioning and the various initiatives that Foodhall has been taking to make gourmet retailing in India a truly international experience for its customers.

← **Avni Biyani,**  
Concept Head, Foodhall



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# Getting Started with Demand Forecasting

Sophisticated planning is modest, but growing, in grocery.

By **John Karolefski**

**W**heatsville Food Co-op, in Austin, Texas, relies on a variety of techniques to forecast demand for everyday shopping. There's a decade's worth of sales and movement data in its point-of-sale system that can be accessed to determine the activity of a particular item or category.

For seasonal variations created by holidays such as Thanksgiving, the co-op can see what popular traditional items shoppers bought. By comparing past sales dollars, more recent customer count and average basket, a reasonable estimate can be made for the current year.

"While we know that stuffing and turkeys are Thanksgiving staples, we have also noticed the rise in demand for gluten-free bread products and

vegan meat alternatives," notes Niki Nash, packaged manager for the only retail food cooperative operating in Texas. "As specialized diets become more mainstream, our variety and amount of these products have increased. Each year, we monitor these nontraditional versions of traditional favorites for popularity and adjust our orders for the next year. By using a perpetual inventory management system, we make sure that we're never out of key items."

Whether they're co-ops, independent grocers or large regional food chains, companies must maintain the right balance of supply and demand to prepare for surge periods such as Thanksgiving, as well as for everyday shopping. Out-of-stocks during the holidays — or any time of the year, for that matter — may have long-term negative implications for shopper loyalty. In other words, customers change stores.







### Strategic Position

What specific things can grocers do to start off on the right foot?

Debbie Stanton Johnson, grocery industry principal at Capgemini Consulting, an international consultancy with U.S. offices in six states, advises grocers to position demand forecasting as a strategic initiative across the value chain, supporting customer loyalty and vendor and employee engagement while ensuring requirements are gathered across the various business functions and organizations.

“Data consistency, quality and availability are key to a successful demand forecast,” Johnson explains. “Most forecasting algorithms require more than one year of stores’ TLOG [transaction log] data, and for improved accuracy, a minimum of two years of TLOG data. This data should be available for all locations: stores, e-commerce, catalogs, etc.

“Grocery encompasses most of the complexity seen in retail for demand forecasting,” she continues. “Short lifecycle products, date-driven products, fresh products such as produce and meat each have unique and specific complexities. It is essential for grocers to not only be able to fully understand the implications of the complexity, but also to ensure that the benefits outweigh the costs.”

To launch a program, she suggests picking a less complex assortment like core grocery because it will deliver visible success with quantitative benefits and build momentum for the product categories.

“Don’t underestimate the value of data quality,” notes Mitchell, of SAS. “To truly understand demand, you need information beyond standard sales and inventory data. Also consider data like product attributes, trading-area demographic data, and data about seasonal changes like weather and holidays. It’s also important to invest in education for your team, make the organizational changes that will help you become a data-driven enterprise, and roll out forecasting projects with built-in milestones to show ROI from the start.”

Toby Brzoznowski, EVP of Llamasoft, an Ann Arbor, Mich.-based provider of supply chain design, analytics and optimization solutions, adds that demand forecasting needs the flexibility to handle seasonality and varied demand patterns, and the ability to look in detailed granularity. Having forecasting in the cloud is also a benefit for a forecasting solution, given the high number of SKUs and the ability to use high-performance computing, he points out.

Meanwhile, Christian Hagen, partner in the digital transformation practice of Chicago-based consultancy A.T. Kearney, cautions grocers that forecasting, replenishment and allocation are different for perishables. She offers several recommendations to help drive benefits and performance:



**Costs for the technology are coming down. Now, smaller players in the marketplace can afford to pay and play in a way that’s most efficient and cost-effective.**

— Mike Neff  
Kurt Salmon

“Back-of-an-envelope calculations and simple spreadsheets don’t cut it when you’re making forecasting decisions about assortments, pricing, promotions and supply chain. These areas depend on accurately predicting consumer demand, and that accuracy depends on analytics,” says Dan Mitchell, a retail industry consultant for SAS, a Cary, N.C.-based provider of analytics, business intelligence, and data management software and services.

Grocers can use demand forecasting in a number of areas today, including labor and staffing, perishables, replenishment of shelf-stable goods, response to promotions, and understanding the effect of price changes by product and geography. Some companies are obviously further along than others on the path to effective demand forecasting. In fact, many are just beginning the journey to using these technologies effectively.

“It’s important to note that the necessary technology is out there, though grocery is traditionally low in adopting these existing technologies,” says Mike Neff, a partner at New York-based consultancy Kurt Salmon. “However, with the existence of these companies moving to cloud-based applications, costs for the technology are coming down. Now, smaller players in the marketplace can afford to pay and play in a way that’s most efficient and cost-effective. The trend in getting more technology to exist will provide better capabilities in small and large grocery spaces.”

### Design perishables-specific forecasting and replenishment solutions

- Leverage market-leading applications and tools for forecasting analytics
- Standardize a toolset for perishables
- Drive replenishment planning to prioritize “freshness”
- Define the right metrics and track with data

### Partner with suppliers

- Work with suppliers to understand their fresh and perishable supply chain and constraints
- Co-create solutions to ensure performance is being optimized end to end
- Establish pilots to test improvement opportunities — track the metrics in these pilots to gauge performance accurately.

### Real-time Reality

In April 2016, research by the Kurt Salmon consultancy found that 55 percent of food spending isn't done in conventional grocery stores, but in alternative classes of trade. Why? It determined that out-of-stocks at store level aren't being tolerated by consumers. In fact, grocers are faced with a bigger problem than in years past.

“Also, you can't just look at point of sale or one data option,” says Kurt Salmon's Neff. “More and better data is critical. In addition to syndicated data, it's time we add a third option in e-commerce.

“  
Consider data like product attributes, trading area demographic data, and data about seasonal changes like weather and holidays. It's also important to invest in education for your team.

— Dan Mitchell  
SAS



Click-and-collect e-commerce for grocers is much more common and important. It provides better info that is closer to the trends of what's happening at a particular store level while meeting the needs and demands of customers. Folks can leverage the technology and different levels of immersion into that technology that will take traditional points of sale, syndicated data and e-commerce data to provide information to grocers that wasn't available before.”

Ron Wilson, another partner at Kurt Salmon, stresses the need for real-time data to interact and engage to create agility and get better at tracking perpetual inventory.

“DSRs [demand signal repositories] aren't good enough to address problems today because they're looking on a daily basis. The only way it'll truly be solved [is] if we can get to a place where we can interact and engage consumers in a mobile environment that's used collaboratively in real time in both mobile and retail to get them these core products that we need,” Wilson says. “Until then, we rely on relevancy of daily data and market retail data, which can take three to four weeks, so it's too late.

“There needs to be a Big Data approach.” he continues, “that allows grocers to look at things in real time and create and use the types of science and analytics to start predicting potential impacts, and being able to provide a way to solve them. Applying scientific mathematics to how one can address and understand demand, and then using innovation to approach it, will drive more value — though it may incur more cost.”

### Realizing Benefits

Cost notwithstanding, the good news is that more grocers have adopted solutions and processes for demand forecasting focused on replenishment and inventory management. They are realizing benefits in the areas of improved profitability, increased product availability, optimized inventory and reduced inventory holding costs.

“Integrating promotional planning with demand forecasting is essential to tighten forecasts,” says Johnson, of Capgemini. “Leading grocers are modeling their data to improve new store opening and holiday/promotional period forecasts. For new store openings, established and current store clustering and segmentation models enable forecasts to project sales for similar stores. These models predict improved forecasts and display patterns historically relevant in other clusters.

“What is increasingly the ‘Holy Grail’ for grocers,” she continues, “is to leverage unstructured data like social trending to pick up on categories and brands that will experience demand. ... While there are definite challenges to implementation, the key to success for organizations is to adapt and utilize real-time information.” **PG**



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# Consumer behaviour is changing and how!

**T**rends show a steady and progressive shift in consumers' aspirations and spending behaviours—in certain categories. For one thing, shopping is becoming more social—involving all family members—and much more frequent, thanks to the rise of online shopping.

**Aspiring households are also trading up more frequently in categories such as apparel, buying better brands for everyone in the family. At the same time, consumers in numerous basic categories such as biscuits, salty snacks, tea, and kitchen and floor cleaners are far less conscious about the brands.**



Many consumers are making different buying and trade-off decisions. For example, immediate gratification is becoming more important. So while the biggest desires of aspiring households are still about owning a house and a car, nowadays more of these consumers also want to take international vacations. Similarly, affluent households are becoming comfort seekers, and they are willing to pay for it.

## Spending Behaviour

Aspiring households are also trading up more frequently in categories such as apparel, buying better brands for everyone in the family. At the same

time, consumers in numerous basic categories such as biscuits, salty snacks, tea, and kitchen and floor cleaners are far less conscious about the brands.

Social media is playing a big role in bringing about the change in consumer behaviour and our spending patterns. People want to fit in with their peers. This is true for all manner of urban and rural consumers. Nationwide, internet penetration rose from 8% in 2010 to almost 25% in 2016. It is likely to grow to 55% or more by 2025, when the number of users will likely reach 850 million. The composition of the user base is also changing. Most of the digital focus to date has been on urban users, but rural areas will see much of the action for the rest of this decade.

We expect that more than half of all new internet users will be in rural communities and that rural users will constitute about half of all Indian internet users in 2020. Also, the users are older and more mature. Today, more than half of all users are 24 years old or younger, but by 2020 about 65% of users will be 25 or older.

Companies need to consider these aspects of rising digital penetration and its increasing influence on consumption patterns and get ready to win the battles of retail for tomorrow. **PG**



**The author has over 30 years of learnings and winning experience with Food Retail, New concept/ brands, FMCG and Organised Retail. Currently he heads Dubai Overseas Trade office in India and is on the Board of Skill Development – SME for Retail – besides also advising on international food retailing in India. He is reachable at [rakeshgambhir@imagesgroup.in](mailto:rakeshgambhir@imagesgroup.in)**

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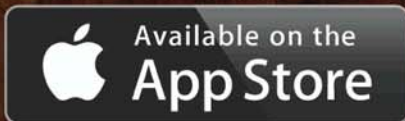
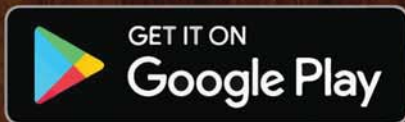
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


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# Hitching business to the online wagon

E-retail is giving tough competition to physical stores, gaining ground in revenue and visibility as consumers distance themselves from the traditional supermarket model.

By **Rajiv Kumar**

**T**he competition in the food retail market has increased in recent years. Traditional food retailers are facing fierce pressure from alternative channels, including warehouse clubs, supercenters, drug stores, mass retailers and convenience stores, as well as online retailers and grocery delivery services. Let's take a look into how e-retail, in terms of food and grocery, is winning brownie points.

## Success story of e-retail so far

Virtual baskets don't necessarily mirror physical ones, with the relationship being inversely proportional in nature. As consumers warm up to the idea of e-grocery, retailers are realizing that some categories of products are simply better suited for e-commerce than others. This leads to discrepancies in adaptation rates varying from market to market. While immediate use items like fresh and frozen

foods, condiments and beverages are slower in adoption for the western market, the abundance of fresh produce farming leads to a spike in purchase of these products for East. There is also a tremendous opportunity among niche consumer segments — especially in the healthy eating space and other categories that may be more difficult to find on in-store shelves. E-commerce is well suited to specialty retailing because it allows companies to offer greater product selection in a category than would typically be available in brick-and-mortar stores — a factor that forms an integral benchmark of globalization in markets of India and her neighbours.

## Trends that contribute to the success of food e-commerce

**Mobility:** Mobility has risen to be the primary factor, with consumers choosing the comforts of home for even the most minor grocery shopping. For countries like India, there is a great potential for



online retailers that offer consumers a wide variety of high on health-and-life foods and provide guidance for consumers aspiring to healthier lives. A number of specialty retailers have emerged in the technology space, from national online grocery delivery services with extensive fresh sections to local produce delivery services. Also, specialized meal delivery services have emerged to provide consumers the ingredients, delivered to the comforts of their homes. Dining in and food delivery is gaining market share and they account for 15-20 per cent of the market now.

**Technology - a game changer:** The rapid widening of food technology bracket is a very positive development as far as groceries are concerned because one can reach a number of retailers for delivery, and it has also made the market intrinsically competitive and transparent. A whole range of food tech concepts have come in – be it for food exploration, discovery, reservations, delivery, feedback, Internet restaurants among others. There is increased competition as well as higher performance benchmarks for the restaurant and grocery sectors. Internet only, and differentiated retailers are gaining traction as they are eliminating acute challenges, like high rentals and manpower attrition, and connecting directly with the consumers.

**Rise of organic food:** The demand for natural and organic products has led to increased competition within the retail space, and it has come as an opportunity for e-grocers. Natural organic food has become a staple in local health food stores and in most e-grocery stores. Almost all food stores now carry a special section of natural and organic food. Consumers are demanding more and more certified organic foods and this has spurred the demand for organic to an all-time high. With the increase of venerable diseases such as E coli, salmonella, and Listeria, people are becoming more aware of the food they put into their bodies. Consumers want to be healthy at all costs and such food offers the assurance of no pesticides or toxins. This has given impetus to retailers to go the online way, making organic the winning formula of success.

**Personalization:** Algorithms and predictive analytics get a greater chunk of attention these days, owing to them being valuable tools for personalizing offers and recommendations. Yet the “secret sauce” that makes them pertinent to e-retail sector is data about individual customers. With the current rise of innovative measures to mine the viral wagon, grocery retailers have a great strength in that they know how to be effective “fast followers.” Yet the key to exploiting that strength is in knowing who to follow – and personalizing accordingly. This is an important tool that shouldn’t be ignored. Past



purchases, frequent visits to a particular section and data on consumption patterns are helping the online players in getting the valuable information that they require. In today’s world, the competitor to follow is the one that’s furthest ahead on the learning curve of understanding and serving their customers – this makes online retailers the ones to watch out for.

**Bridging digital with in-store:** Although major force now, e-commerce is only a section of the digital picture. A complete digital strategy includes interaction at every point along the path to purchase, including finding stores, making lists, checking prices, researching products, sharing content and purchasing. These touch points occur both in and out of stores, and consumers are increasingly using technology to simplify and improve the process. In-store digital options can bring the ease, convenience and personalization of online into brick-and-mortar stores. Inculcating digital strategies into the physical experience is a valuable addition as these options can increase dwell time, engagement levels, basket size and shopper satisfaction.

### Conclusion

The industry is incredibly dynamic and there is constant pressure to adapt formats to address evolving customer preferences. Larger players have been much more receptive to operating a broad portfolio of store formats, including online factions to tap into the digital market. Yet new entrants are experimenting through integrated platforms to gain ground. In doing so, these players have been able to leverage their infrastructures to drive higher sales, margins and investment returns. **PG**



The writer is Founder and CEO, StoreHippo, a SaaS based E-commerce platform that enables businesses to go online.

**With the current rise of innovative measures to mine the viral wagon, grocery retailers have a great strength in that they know how to be effective “fast followers.” Yet the key to exploiting that strength is in knowing who to follow – and personalizing accordingly.**



# Kannur's most famous bakers

The Venus Group is popular for its Sheen Bakery stores in Kannur, Kerala. The family-run business is now managed by the second generation of family entrepreneurs. Veenish Kumar, Managing Partner at Venus Group of Concerns, talks to Progressive Grocer about how the business has evolved over the years and his plans for the future.

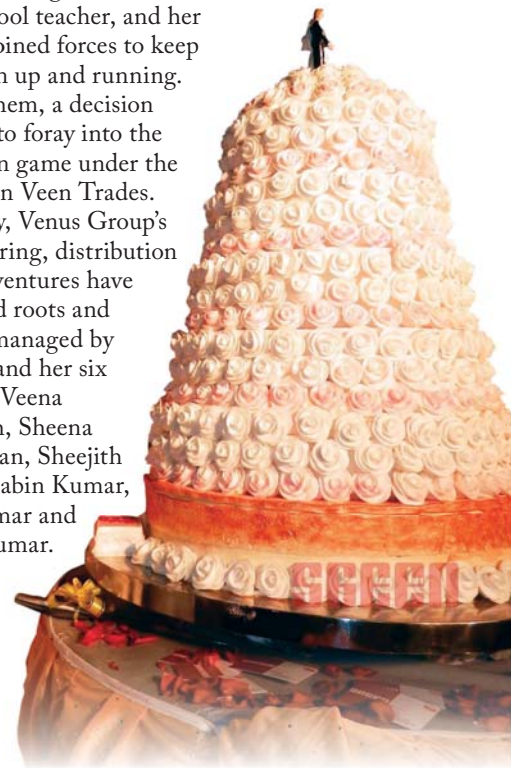
By **Roshna Chandran Stonebridge**

**U**ppot Kumaran, the late founder of Venus Group of Concerns in Kannur, Kerala, learned the ropes of business while working as an apprentice in an old bakery. In 1952, he decided to launch his own business under the banner of Venus Group of Concerns. His hunger for driving his business to the next level and his determination and passion to succeed led him to open Standard Bakery in 1960. This new outlet in Kannur quickly became famous for its three trademark products – Bread, Rusk and Cake. His unbounded energy drove him to open another two Standard Bakery outlets in Kasargod and Valavatnam in Kerala, in 1965 and 1966. Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, Kumaran expanded his baking units with the launch of Sheen Bakery in 1970. This outlet was strategically located next to the busy Kannur railway station and grew to be one of Venus Group's popular bakery destinations, a reputation it enjoys till date.

## DAILY PRODUCTION OUTPUT AT VENUS GROUP

- Cakes: 100 Kg ■ Bread: 2,000 pieces
- Samosas: 100 Kg ■ Snacks: 500 Kg
- Sweets: 100 Kg

In 1974, Uppot Kumaran breathed his last as he was about to open another bakery outlet in the State. Two of his brother-in-laws – Mohan and Surendran – stepped in to complete the unfinished project and decided to name the new outlet 'Kumars' in memory of Kumaran. As the business required close monitoring, Kumaran's wife Saraswati, a retired school teacher, and her brothers, joined forces to keep the concern up and running. Between them, a decision was taken to foray into the distribution game under the name Sheen Veen Trades. As of today, Venus Group's manufacturing, distribution and retail ventures have struck solid roots and are being managed by Saraswati and her six children – Veena Sathyanath, Sheena Rathnakaran, Sheejith Kumar, Shabin Kumar, Shajin Kumar and Veenish Kumar.





### Renovations and expansion

“I grew up surrounded by the family business,” says Veenish who acts as the key decision maker as well as Managing Partner at Venus Group of Concerns. “The cakes baked in those days were done the old fashioned way. There were two people who would stir a huge ladle from an urn to prepare the cake mixture. Baking was done in brick ovens and ingredients like maida, which was sold under a quota system, used to come from the Kannur port.”

Veenish, with his mother’s guidance, set about renovating and expanding the manufacturing units. He demolished the old office at Bellard Road and rebuilt it into a factory unit, which he named after his father – Kumar Towers. The multi-storied building has a total area of 8,000 square feet with a factory space of 1,500 square feet for baking fresh cream cakes and pastries.

In 1999, Veenish opened Chifonet, a multi-cuisine restaurant and a year later, he opened Baker Boys. Both store and restaurant are located at Kumar Towers. He also evolved the retail space by adding a seating capacity for eight customers and by stocking other branded products at the Baker Boys outlet. “The average ticket is Rs.150-200 and our fastest moving categories have been cake, bread and sweets,” he reveals.

In 2003, Vineesh opened New Sheen Confectionery. At the same time, he also expanded Sheen Bakery by opening new outlets in Talap in 2009 and at the Kannur main bus stand in 2010. Currently, Sheen bakery products also have retail presence at the Greens Hypermarket, Orange Supermarket and at the Metro in Kannur.

“I also started a factory in Talap 12 years ago for manufacturing Venus products. It was a small space, so then we bought out the adjacent properties one by one to expand the factory,” Veenish says. This unit was dedicated to producing Venus bread and snacks. Another Sheen manufacturing unit was also set up near the old Kannur bus stand for producing savoury items.



To bring his old units up to snuff with modern practices, Vineesh replaced the earlier brick ovens with gas and diesel ovens. The retail outlets have all been upgraded with cooling showcases and refrigerators.”We have also expanded our product categories,” informs Vineesh. “Our bread now comes in many varieties – wheat, brown, fruit and multigrain. The savouries and sweets categories have also new product lines. We have also started our online business, which is being managed by my nephew Nived Nath.”

The annual turnover at Venus Group is Rs. 18 crore currently. All stores are approximately 800 square feet in area and also stock other branded product such as biscuits, aerated drinks, juice and beverage.

### Challenges

“Attrition, of course, is a huge challenge and we have to keep training new staff. Maintaining fresh stock is also difficult in the case of perishable items. By the end of the day, we have to destroy expired items from all our outlets,” explains Veenish. “Apart from a few top retailers in Kannur, we have not started supplying our bakery products to other retail stores since they are highly perishable. Moreover, we are not sure how the retailer will handle the goods. There is no guarantee.”

### Future

Veenish has plans of expanding to another restaurant and two more bakery units by next year. “We also plan to expand through the franchise route besides opening an exclusive showroom near the railways station.” With the Union ministry of Food Processing pushing its ‘Food Park’ initiatives, the Venus Group is also mulling to take up an industrial area to start export operations once it puts in place a system of better packaging of its products. **PG**



“Attrition is a huge challenge and we have to keep training new staff. Maintaining fresh stock is also difficult in the case of perishable items.”

— Veenish Kumar  
Managing Partner,  
Venus Group



# Give a wide berth to chemically ripened mangoes

Mangoes have a rich legacy and are known for their nutritive value. But in today's environment, they are also a cause of concern. As the mango season breaks in, it challenges the demand-supply mechanism, leaving room for unethical ways to manage demand upswings.

By Santanu Bhattacharjee



As the summer season peaks, mangoes can be seen everywhere! The king of fruits is a common love most of us share in the sultry months. I still have fond memories of plucking mangoes from the tree and savouring it till the last bite. As a die-hard aficionado of mangoes, I wait for this season every year, to delight my taste buds with an assortment of different varieties. We Indians have been fortunate enough to have hundreds of varieties with each region having its own speciality and price range. A quick take on the historic journey of mango tells us that the fruit has been with us for about 4,000 years now and has been savoured by various empires and monarchies down the ages. So much so, some emperors have even favoured this fruit as a tool of diplomacy and it has travelled across nations. Mangoes even find mention in Vedic literatures and the fruit's leaves are considered to be auspicious, signifying life.

Not only does mango have a rich history but the fruit also carries its goodness in abundance of nutrition. It is rich in Vitamin A along with natural detoxifying agents like flavonoids, carotenes, and polyphenols. The fruit is also rich in dietary fiber and contains the right amount of simple sugars.

Moreover, mangoes are loaded with phytonutrients and trace elements like Vitamin C. Apart from these nutrients, mangoes contain 25 different kinds of carotenoids, which help to keep our immune system healthy and provide protection against pathogens.

With such a rich legacy and nutritive value, mangoes in today's environment are also becoming a cause of concern. As the season breaks in, it challenges the demand-supply mechanism, leaving room for unethical routes to manage demand upswings. The not-so-mature mangoes are harvested for market and, in the process, are treated with a chemical called Calcium Carbide, popularly known as 'Masala'. This agent acts as a ripening agent and ripens the fruit in a much faster way but also leaves behind traces of arsenic and phosphorus. It is a very strong reactive chemical and when it comes in contact with moisture, it produces acetylene gas. Acetylene is believed to affect the human nervous system by reducing oxygen supply to the brain and may cause mouth ulcers, gastric irritation or even food poisoning. The use of such chemicals as ripening agents has been considered hazardous by food safety authorities and is not permissible under Indian laws. The chemical, which ripens mangoes within hours, is banned in most parts of the world. However, it is easily available in our country. Several studies have shown that Calcium Carbide is carcinogenic and can cause several disorders in a normal human body.

What could be the objective behind such malpractice? Largely, it is aimed to cut short the time to manage the demand and supply chain, but it also offers monetary benefits to the flouters. A mango loses almost 7%-10% moisture under natural ripening process, which reduces its weight and may impact its market realization. In order to make an easy buck, these wrong doers resort to such unethical tactics without once thinking of the harm their practices pose to consumers' health.

Another aspect to ponder upon is that the natural ripening of mangoes is a time-taking process and requires a period of few days. In order to trigger this natural process, a dedicated infrastructure of ripening chambers is necessary but that involves significant investment.





So as a normal consumer, one should be watchful of such unethical and sharp practices. Mangoes ripened through the unethical way lose their sheen, taste, aroma and nutritional value. But the fruits can be polished to give them a glossy veneer. It is therefore difficult for consumers to even identify artificially ripened mangoes. The best way to savour your favourite fruit is to opt for semi-ripened mangoes and let them ripen at home. And the easiest way to identify the right mango and to assess if it is fully mature is by checking its shoulder, which should be swollen. Also, the mango you choose should be free from decay, insect infestation, sap burn, hail damage, shrivels, cut skin, etc. In addition, you can apply a small amount of pressure on the fruit to determine its hardness. In other words, the buying decision needs take into account factors like the fruit's outer appearance and aroma rather than merely its glowing skin.

After you are done with the selection of mangoes, you can naturally ripen them at home by simply wrapping them in a sheet of paper and storing them in a tray or a box kept in ambient room temperature. You should then cover the mangoes with newspapers or a sheet of cloth. After three days, your safe matured mangoes will be ready for savouring.

India's food safety authority has also notified the measures to ensure the safeness of mangoes through ethical ways of ripening by using 'Ethylene', which is a natural ripening agent and accelerates the ripening process. It is important to note that ethylene has no adverse effect on our health as well as on the fruits ripened by it, which are safe for consumption. But these measures are followed by only a handful of players from the organised sector. As in the case of the high level of awareness against the harmful use of alcohol and cigarettes to the human body, it's high time now to create a similar kind of awareness against slow poisons like calcium carbide. **PG**

**India's food safety authority has also notified the measures to ensure the safeness of mangoes through ethical ways of ripening using 'Ethylene', which is a natural ripening agent and accelerates the ripening process.**



The writer is Business Head – Safal Retail. Views expressed are personal.



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# “We are market leaders in finding the next trend-setting product”

Avni Biyani is the driving force behind Future Retail's premium lifestyle food superstore Foodhall. Since coming on board as Concept Head of the premium superstore chain, Avni has been successfully breaking new ground in gourmet food retailing in India. Since 2011, when Foodhall opened its first store at Mumbai's Palladium mall, she has been at the forefront of bringing the best of international and local ingredients to Indian food connoisseurs.

In a chat with Progressive Grocer, Avni talks of her chain's customer proposition and its market positioning and the various initiatives that Foodhall has been taking to make gourmet retailing in India a truly international experience for its customers.

**A**vni Biyani's gourmet store chain stocks everything one can expect to find at any international food store. The offerings range from tomatillo (green tomatoes of Mexico) to gluten-free breads such as pizza dough, bagels, to a range of super-food options such as Greek yoghurts, fat-free organic milk, tofu, gourmet chocolates, oils and vinegars, smoked salmon, mock meats, specialty cold cuts, teas, fresh truffles and various food delights, including a variety of Indian foods.

To add to its mojo and burnish the stores' reputation further as a foodie's paradise, Avni has led Foodhall blaze a trail of path-breaking innovations in recent years. Under her leadership, Foodhall has also launched a string of its own highly acclaimed brands, which includes the spices brand Arqa, The House of Tea, dry fruit brand Bustaan, a traditional food range under Traditions, personalized chef service Party Chef and gifting brand Blue Ribbon. Recently, Avni also co-founded WhisQ with dessert chef Pooja Dhingra, and launched a nine-piece macaron set under the brand. Edited excerpts from the interview.

## What is the customer proposition and marketing positioning of your store?

Foodhall is targeted at the urban traveler who has a global taste palate. With an exhaustive range of offerings – from daily essentials to exotic food — Foodhall is a foodie's paradise. It is a one-stop shop for people looking for “exotic”, hard-to-find cooking ingredients. You get everything from truffle oil and Hass avocado to the equipment required for specialized cooking. Our aim is that a customer gets to discover something new every time they come to Foodhall.

We extensively work to get better and newer products and ensure that we stay in line with world food trends. This is what helps us retain customers and attract newer ones.

## What is the typical customer profile of shoppers in your store?

Our shoppers are mostly food lovers who have travelled a lot or those who are exposed to global cuisine.

We also get lots of expat and HNI customers. Our



**Avni Biyani,**  
Concept Head, Foodhall



stores are located in neighborhoods where at least 30 per cent of those walking in are expatriates – in areas such as Saket and Vasant Kunj in Delhi and Whitefield in Bengaluru. But we also get food lovers in our stores buying ingredients and wanting to experience new trends. We also get tourists wanting to take back a flavor of India.

**How do you engage with the young generation – the millennial shopper?**

At Foodhall, we have tried to engage with all our customers by informing and educating them about newer things. Our visual merchandising team plays a vital role on this front. We go the extra mile by ensuring that the product is displayed beautifully with relevant information guides, recipe cards and how-to manuals placed around it. We have bay breakers with unique bites of information about various products that customers may not be familiar with. We also have ‘experience zones’ where we give information about the product and conduct samplings. By offering the samples, we familiarize the customer with the product by allowing them to touch, smell, feel and taste it, thus making them more comfortable with the product. We also keep changing the theme for the various experience zones on a monthly basis.

**Of the gourmet and international product range at your chain, which products are recording maximum growth?**

There is a high demand for FnV, cheese, chocolates and cuisine- based products.

**In your view, which new food products at your stores will likely gain sales tractions in the coming days?**

The superfoods category will see the maximum demand. Also, special dietary requirement foods, which include vegan and gluten-free products, are the next big trend we will get to see.

**What is the rate of growth of gourmet and International foods at your store?**

The growth rate is quite high and we expect it to remain that way for years to come.

**What is the % revenue contribution from gourmet and International products?**

It is in the range of 60% to 70%.

**Which are the new and emerging categories in your store?**

We have recently introduced a new baking brand WhisQ, in association with Pooja Dhingra, founder

**We go the extra mile by ensuring that the product is displayed beautifully with relevant information guides, recipe cards and how-to manuals placed around it. We have bay breakers with unique bites of information about various products that customers may not be familiar with.**





## DRIVING EXCELLENCE ON KEY PARAMETERS



**Marketing activities, collaboration with brands and digital initiatives:** Foodhall extensively uses social media to create awareness not only about its brands but also for collaboration with artisanal vendors to promote products in a way that enhances customer experience. Its strategy for suppliers and vendors is to treat them as partners and work to create brands together.

The retailer shares unique recipes, videos, gifts and images of selected non-local products on social media and its website. At the same time, it gets many queries on its social pages asking for unique products like yuzu, miso, artichokes, gochujang, etc, that are hard to come by in the city. So it understands the importance of promoting such exotic products and talking about them to its customers.

Foodhall's digital initiative is exemplified by Foodhall Interconnect – an application that facilitates learning at the click of a button. Anytime, anywhere! With information on the product origin, cooking uses, health benefits and more, the app helps Foodhall's ambassadors to educate and inspire customers to experience and use its exclusive local and international products.

Then, there is mix-and-match bundling and cross-promotion activities. For its experience zone, Foodhall tries to incorporate different products, which can be collated for use as a recipe and to enhance customer experience. One example is using spiralizers to make zoodles, etc.

Foodhall stores pride on creating experiences for the customer through product demos and sampling activities. Since most of the offerings are gourmet and exotic, understanding and seeing how the ingredients are used helps the customer decide what to buy. The chain is known for introducing different experience zones every month. Each zone focuses and talks about a particular ingredient or dish and has sampling for the customers. E-mailers are sent to customers updating them about the various experience zones and the latest offerings at the stores.

Foodhall also regularly hosts masterclasses in all its stores in order to engage with the customer and educate them about a particular cuisine or ingredient. These masterclasses are hosted by food connoisseurs of particular cuisines who demonstrate recipes to customers.

and executive chef of the Mumbai-based French bakery chain Le15 Patisserie. The new baking brand houses all the baking essentials.

### **What, in your opinion, are the big pull factors for gourmet and International/ Imported foods in India?**

The growing advent of travel outside the country, proliferation of more food channels, increasing NRI and expat population, growing numbers of food experimenters, rising disposable income, among others, are giving a big push to the gourmet and International foods category.

### **Could high prices be a major inhibiting factor to the wider acceptance and growth of gourmet and International foods?**

We don't necessarily think so. There is always a market at all levels and customers are ready to pay the prices where there is a requirement of the range. Our efforts, however, are to keep working on the prices with our suppliers with a view to give value to our customers.



## FOODHALL AT A GLANCE

Name of the parent company: **Future Retail Ltd.**  
 Retailer's name: **Foodhall – Part of Future Group**  
 Date of start of operations: **May 2011**  
 Headquarters: **Mumbai**  
 Retail format of stores: **Gourmet**  
 Total retail area currently under operation: **Approximately 50,000 sq.ft.**  
 Number of stores currently in operation: **7 (includes 2 Little Foodhall)**  
 Name of cities/towns where the stores are operational: **Mumbai, Delhi NCR, Bangalore**  
 Size of stores: **5,000 sq.ft to 14,000 sq.ft.**  
 Average footfalls per day: **5000 people across all Foodhall stores**  
 SKU count in stores: **10,000 SKUs on average**



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**Initiatives for building customer loyalty:**

The chain has introduced a new program called Foodhall Exclusive. Foodhall Exclusive is more than just any loyalty program. It is an endeavour to indulge its most loyal customers with unique offerings and personalized services – something they have never experienced before. It's an invite-only program and is meant to delight the top 1000-1500 customers. One of the main pillars of this program is the Relationship Manager. Every customer who enrolls for this program gets a RM assigned to him/her. He acts as a one point contact for customer's needs like grocery shopping, gifting, party menu planning, home delivery, product and events information or addressing any special dietary requirements.

Customers also earn exciting cashbacks every time they shop. They become the first ones to know of new launches, get complimentary home delivery services and a beverage of choice, on the house, every time they visit the store.

**Tools and technology:** Foodhall utilizes technology to provide seamless, easy and the best experience for its patrons. To name one, it has replaced handheld scanning devices with mounted

scanners fixed at the cash tills, thus enabling quicker scanning and faster billing. Products are now simply slid across the fixed scanner thus shortening the time consumers spend at billing.

Foodhall's internal MIS system is strong enough to provide data, which can then be compared with the current world trends and emerging trends. It uses the data extensively but also strongly feels that talking to your customers provides the best consumer insights.

**Private label initiatives:** "Engaging with customers on a daily basis also gives you a better perspective about the gaps in the market. With this understanding, Foodhall has created in-house brands that closes those gaps," says Avni Biyani. Foodhall has launched specialty brands for niche products such as The House of Tea, ARQA, Bustaan, Traditions and Foodhall Specials.

For people who love sharing their love for food, Foodhall offers customised services — Blue Ribbon Gifting by Foodhall and Party Chef Menu. "Food trends in Foodhall eventually become mass trends after a few years," says Avni.

**Supply chain management:** The retailer works effectively with vendors to ensure that items that are unique to Foodhall get delivered to all its stores irrespective of the vendor's capability to do so on their own. For instance, cheese has been shipped by air and picked up from the airport; ice-creams were sent by trains and picked up at railway stations. Foodhall has now built-in fixed days for all such vendors to ship their products on the same day of the week in order to increase efficiencies.

Foodhall is engaged in extensive work at both the front-end and back-end. The retailer encourages the vendors to provide fresh stock and it does a thorough check to ensure consistency. This way, it is able to ensure that customers always get fresh stocks and that helps to build a positive perception about the brand.



**Of the total shelf space at your store, what is the percentage share occupied by the gourmet and International product range?**

About 60 per cent of the shelf space at our stores is occupied by the gourmet and International range.

**Who are your top suppliers for gourmet and International products?**

There are different suppliers for different categories. A few examples are Tree of Life, Dabon, Fortune, Saksham Impex, Bloom, etc.

**Are there enough good and quality suppliers for gourmet and International foods?**

There are some very good and quality suppliers but a few more will definitely expand the overall market.

**Any suggestion on what suppliers of gourmet and International foods could do to expand and grow the category further.**

We feel that they can get their act together faster and move into more newer categories considering the emerging trends.

**What are your future plans for expansion?**

Foodhall appeals to a very different set of customers. Hence, we will be cautious about deciding the demographics for new stores. We are looking for suitable places and will not just expand Foodhall rapidly.







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## PUTTING PASSION INTO PRACTICE

Twenty-seven-year-old Avni Biyani is the youngest daughter of Kishore Biyani, Chief Executive of Future Group. She formally joined Future Group in 2011 as the Concept Head of Foodhall. Over the years, the concept store launched at Palladium, Mumbai, garnered immense popularity with a discerning customer base and now has presence across the high-end regions of Delhi NCR, Mumbai and Bangalore. In a short span of time, Avni has established Foodhall as India's premium lifestyle food destination – a one-stop shop offering novel concepts from around the world on one platter. The store targets the well-travelled urban Indian consumers who love to experiment with global cuisines and promises to expose customers to the next level of food retailing.

As a connoisseur of food and global cuisine, Avni loves travelling and exploring new places and has travelled extensively across the world, which has translated into her vision for Foodhall. Observing customers inspires her in many ways to comprehend a lot of business practices and selling styles. Avni is also a part of Future Group's Integrated Food Strategy Council and is responsible for ramping up the group's foray into the premium food segment.

Avni studied at Dhirubhai Ambani International School and graduated in sociology & politics from New York University. Apart from her interest in liberal arts and humanities and food, Avni also has a keen interest in the fashion & lifestyle segment of the business and is closely involved with the launch of India's first fast fashion brand – Cover Story.



**We also have 'experience zones' where we give information about the product and conduct samplings. By offering the samples, we familiarize the customer with the product by allowing them to touch, smell, feel and taste it, thus making them more comfortable with the product.**



### How would you assess your progress and achievements so far?

A new feather in our cap has been the launch of a first of its kind specialty store – Little Foodhall. They say good things come in small packages and Little Foodhall brings the most premium offerings of Foodhall, albeit in a snug and elegant space. Our interactive store lets you explore horizons and understand the food culture from across continents. The highlight of Little Foodhall is the quaint cafe that dishes out sumptuous meals to the famished corporate

crowd who don't have time for a proper lunch. Those with a discerning palate will appreciate The House of Tea for its vast collection of finest teas while spice enthusiasts will be bowled over by ARQA's aromatic range of hand-ground spices, salts and blends. Pick edible gifts for your loved ones from our luxurious Blue Ribbon Gifting section that also has a delectable Middle Eastern sweets collection, which is perfect for gifting or indulging. At Little Foodhall, you can hop aboard a culinary voyage to taste the best of superfoods and nuts, freshly baked breads, world renowned processed food, artisan cheese, refreshing drinks, gourmet chocolates and so much more. When you visit the store, what you witness is a little world full of finest quality products, which will add a mix of beauty and nourishment to your home.

We are always working towards finding newer products and we strongly feel we are market leaders in finding the next trend-setting product. Our range and quality of products is enviable. Our own store brands like Arqa in gourmet spices and THT in premium tea have set impeccable benchmarks in their respective areas. **PG**



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# How to loyalize your customer base

Progressive Grocer speaks to retailers with hands-on experience in running and developing loyalty programs to find out about the ways of making them into a powerful platform for meaningful engagement with customers and winning their trust in the brand.



**What do think is the optimal approach for retailers to run their loyalty programs and how are you doing it in your organisation?**

**Shibani P Shourie, Retail Consultant:** Customer engagement is the key to running a successful loyalty program. Of all the loyalty programs that I have run or been a part of, the most important thing I have focused on is to develop a better understanding of the consumer. It is important to understand the customer's shopping behavior and what they expect from the brand. The way to do it is through the various formal and informal insights and detailed analyses, which a retailer gets from the data available. Based on the analyses and data, a retailer can craft well thought out strategies and tactical plans. As there are different segments of customers, each one has to be engaged differently. Loyalty programs are designed to convert shoppers into advocates of the brand. A successful loyalty program is one that builds customers' faith and belief in the brand, and retailers should aim to create such loyalty programs.

**Manoj Jain, Vice President – Marketing, Loyalty & VM, HyperCITY Retail (India) Ltd.:** HyperCITY's loyalty program is called the Discovery Club.

Apart from adding value through the point system wherein customers earn points by spending, it has been our constant endeavor to remain relevant to our customers and pre-empt their needs. With this objective, we have introduced many meaningful services for our customers. We want our customers to experience the “wow” feeling and we are doing it by addressing the day-to-day issues in their lives. For example, we realized that most of the customers find it difficult to drive to- and -from the store during peak hours. So we formed an alliance with a taxi aggregator and offered flat rates to ferry customers to- and -from the store. Another example is that we now send a box of samples of the stuff that we sell in the store to our loyal customers' houses every month. This way the customers get to sample the stuff before picking it up at the stores. We have also added a lot of value offerings in terms of 'Wine Tasting' sessions and 'Free Passes' to events (Justin Bieber/

“  
A successful loyalty program is one that builds customers' faith and belief in the brand, and retailers should aim to create such loyalty programs.

— Shibani P Shourie  
Retail Consultant





loyalty points to redeem any brand gift voucher of their choice provided they have sufficient points in their loyalty account.

**Shantanu Saha, Vice President, Reliance Market:**

The loyalty program of Reliance Market – the cash & carry format of Reliance Retail Ltd. – is called Rishta. The program runs for the B2B customers of Reliance Market. The other loyalty program that is run by the other retail formats in the Group is called the R-One program. This program runs across all other Reliance Retail formats, is a very robust and popular program, and is targeted toward B2C customers.

**Do the loyalty programs offer good value to the customers?**

**Shibani P Shourie:** Value is not essentially through points. Contrary to what one believes, there is very little value attached to the percentage that the customer gets back on spends. It is important to give customers ‘innovative’ rewards, which encourages them to keep coming back for more. While a 10% cashback works in some months, an engagement program run over a fixed period leading to instant rewards on spend slabs works well in others. The customer needs to have a reason to choose you over your competition and it is therefore important that each segment of customer is given something month-on-month so as to make you their first choice.

**Manoj Jain:** The greatest value that HyperCITY has created with its customer base is personalizing the program and making the relationship based on engagement rather than transaction. Driven by this insight, we have extended the program to add value on travel, entertainment, events, insurance, etc. So much so that the customer now relates with us not only as a store with a loyalty program but as something that is delivering value to them in their everyday life. I have purposefully not spoken about bonus points and other accelerated points earning/ burning options as these are a part of every other garden variety loyalty program.

**Shibu Philips:** Lulu’s loyalty program has helped to establish a direct relationship with customers, which goes beyond their visits to the mall. Shoppers can use their smartphone to scan purchase receipts in exchange for points that can be



**The greatest value that HyperCITY has created with its customer base is personalizing the program and making the relationship based on engagement rather than transaction.**

— **Manoj Jain**  
Vice President –  
Marketing, Loyalty &  
VM, HyperCITY Retail  
(India) Ltd.



IPL/ etc). Besides, we have created a platform for our customers to become food entrepreneurs by launching an initiative called “Hyper Budding Chef”, which allows the winners to sell their stuff from HyperCITY stores. We strongly believe that for any loyalty program to be successful, it has to be relevant to the everyday life of the customer. With the launch of our omni-channel engagement, we plan to amplify our loyalty program across all channels.

**Shibu Philips, Business Head – Lulu International Shopping Mall Pvt. Ltd.:** Lulu Mall launched its loyalty program – Lulu Happiness Loyalty & Rewards – on 9th November 2015. The program was launched to reward the thousands of regular customer who have been visiting the mall right from its opening. Lulu Happiness is available in Lulu Mall mobile app across Android & iOS platforms. Through Lulu Happiness, every customer who visits the mall and spends at any of the outlets is rewarded with loyalty points, which can be used to redeem gift vouchers from their preferred brands.

We believe in having a “first-hand experience” with the customers by offering them an experience they would like to enjoy again and again. A loyalty program has a short shelf life in the customer’s mind if it fails to keep the customer engaged with the program. We believe that the basic formula for enhancing customer engagement is only through an exciting rewards catalogue. So we have added gift vouchers from all the major brands to our rewards catalogue. Additionally, we offer the brands in the rewards catalogue at a bargain on select offer days, which are variously designated as ‘Deal of Week’, ‘Women’s Wednesday Sale’, ‘Flash Sale’ on Fridays and ‘Weekend Sale’. Customers look forward to these offers, which enable them to utilize their

## Loyalty Program

redeemed against gift vouchers. So every time you spend your money within the mall – from spending money to park your car or to watch a movie, you will earn loyalty points, which is as good as money within the mall.



**Shantanu Saha:** The biggest value our loyalty program has to offer is that of quantity purchase discounts. We are a cash and carry format and our prices are often lower than those of the local wholesale markets. So the value that our program has to offer is a 'Good Price'.

“  
**A loyalty program has a short shelf life in the customer's mind if it fails to keep the customer engaged with the program. We believe that the basic formula for enhancing customer engagement is only through an exciting rewards catalogue.**

— **Shibu Philips**  
Business Head –  
Lulu International  
Shopping Mall Pvt. Ltd.

### **What percentage of your shopper base is covered by your customer loyalty program?**

**Shibani P Shourie:** In the organisations I have worked with, we were able to build loyalty programs where the base was from 70% to 90% of the businesses.

**Manoj Jain:** About 55-60% of the walkins we have in store every single day are part of HyperCITY's DCC program. We intend to grow this number to 75% in 2017-18.

**Shibu Philips:** Close to 25% of the Mall sales are reflected in the loyalty bill submissions. But the customer base forms a much larger percentage.

**Shantanu Saha:** Cannot divulge.

### **What impact do loyalty programs have in terms of sales, customer visits, etc?**

**Shibani P Shourie:** In my last independent assignment, by building advocates through the loyalty program – in a period of four months – one was able to increase acquisition to 2X and increase repeats by 40%.



**Manoj Jain:** Sixty per cent of our sales comes from our loyalty base currently. We add 25,000 new customers every month to our program. The average bill value of DCC customers is 40% higher than a non-DCC member. We have an average repeat of 1.8 times from the loyalty base.

**Shibu Philips:** It's never easy to quantify the impact of any loyalty program. However, the impact is evident when we analyze the buying behavior of our loyalty base. Seventy-eight per cent of our customer base shops at least once a month and the average bill value of a customer who has redeemed a gift voucher is three fold of the gift voucher denomination. It means that if a customer picks up a gift voucher worth Rs. 1,000 he will end up shopping for Rs. 3,000. As our loyalty runs through a mobile-based platform, we even reach customers outside the city who see it as a medium to stay connected with the Mall and which, for us, means essentially creating new customers outside the geographic boundaries.

**Shantanu Saha:** Our loyalty program has helped to increase the stickiness of our customer base thus resulting in an increase in the frequency of visits and also an increase in the basket size.

### **Which elements of the customer reward activities and loyalty program are most popular with the shoppers?**

**Shibani P Shourie:** As I mentioned earlier, customers are different. One size does not fit all. It is important to have the relevant message communicated to the right customer segment, otherwise it is all spam. Cashbacks work for some segments whereas being part of a preview sale works better for others. Getting a gift on their birthday works for yet another set and inviting them to be a part of the decision making process on new products works for yet another group. The key is understanding what excites the customer and giving them that.



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**The biggest value our loyalty program has to offer is that of quantity purchase discounts. We are a cash and carry format and our prices are often lower than those of the local wholesale markets.**

— **Shantanu Saha**  
Vice President,  
Reliance Market

**Manoj Jain:** Most of our accelerated point-earn campaigns are very popular with the customer. Properties like Friday Booster, Mid-week Campaigns, Double Reward Points, Hyper Budding Chef, etc, are all very popular. To cite one instance, a loyal customer (who had shifted base), when she heard about Hyper Budding Chef, came from the UAE to participate in the event. The value-adds we offer as part of the program, have turned out to be a huge differentiator for us when compared to any other program.

**Shibu Philips:** Rewards Catalogue is the most exciting feature of our loyalty program as we keep adding the most popular brands within the mall to the list. We are proud to say that the loyalty rewards offer gifts and gift vouchers from nearly 70% of the brands within the mall.

**Shantanu Saha:** Price discounts remain the most popular feature of our loyalty program at Reliance Market.



**How do you see the evolution of loyalty programs of F&G retailers? Can they use the programs to generate personalized offerings and promotions for customers?**

**Shibani P Shourie:** In F&G, it is important to understand customer baskets and innovate on how one can keep making the customers' lives easier. So if you have a monthly shopper buying common items, can you pre pack her basket and send her a message that it's waiting for her and thus help her save time? Can you do pre-bundles of the frequently purchased products basis shopping habit and give customers a great deal on them? As a business if I've identified that I have a customer who is only buying a certain

category of product, can I give them related offers to buy from another category? For instance, if someone is buying diapers, can I get them to buy baby food at a great deal? Through better segmentation, analysis and a strong IT program, it is definitely possible to do personalized offerings and coupons for F&G customers to keep them coming back for more.

**Manoj Jain:** HyperCITY is not a value format but an experience format store and so it will be difficult to make a generalized statement about the loyalty programs of F&G retailers in general. However, there are certain basic elements that I believe is the same for all loyalty programs. Loyalty has to add value to the everyday life of the customer and get as far away as possible from being just another card in the customer's wallet. Adding value to the program without increasing its cost is the key and the way to ensure it is to identify the needs of the customers and then form a large network of affiliates, which suits the profile of the customer base. There is only so much you can offer as discounts/ points. At the end of the day you aspire for customer stickiness and that can be achieved only if you offer greater relevance to the customer rather than just transactional points.

**Shibu Philips:** The F&G segment is yet to catch up with other segments such as Fashion Retail where loyalty has evolved into a vital cog in the organization's wheel. But the scope for loyalty in F&G is immense given the fact that customer preference for a brand can be influenced if the offerings can be customized by analyzing the buying behavior. The infographic data that loyalty provides can help in building significant promotional strategy.

**Shantanu Saha:** Customers prefer two kinds of gratification. One is instant and the other is a long-term one. Programs running customers analytics and using AI can today suggest an instant gift, which is relevant to the customer's current purchase basket. This can be offered at the cash till. Later, you can suggest future offers and savings based on the customer's long term buying preferences. Loyalty programs can do this, without being intrusive, and make offers at the right time (based on analytics of buying behaviour). Customers are looking for simplicity and direct offers, rather than bundled offers that require too much information or retention of information (like future purchase coupons, etc., even if they are e-based). Keep the offer simple to understand, make it substantial in value and operationally sustainable. **PG**



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# Giants of the Gourmet Galaxy

Despite the thrifty mindset that persists among large sections of Indian consumers, sales of gourmet and international foods – marked by unique and exciting flavor profiles, high-quality formulations and beautiful packaging – are soaring. The trend suggests that apart from food connoisseurs, even value-minded consumers are more often stepping up to the plate to relish small indulgences. The category has been growing at a steady healthy clip of 20% CAGR and is set to gather even greater momentum in the days ahead. The growing consumer interest presents a real opportunity for manufacturers and retailers to differentiate themselves from competitors through their authentic, gourmet-inspired offerings.

By Sanjay Kumar

For some years now, the eating habits of Indian consumers have been evolving – from traditional foods to global food flavours. More than anytime before, a large base of consumers now has more sophisticated palates, make higher nutritional demands, have the ability to afford premium products, and the desire to enjoy them on a regular basis. Marketers describe this class of consumers as belonging to ‘gourmet’ category. The word ‘gourmet’ itself is French, and comes from the world of wine. It was originally the term for a wine broker, or a taste-vin, one who purchased wines for a wine dealer. In the parlance of food retailing, ‘gourmet’ is used to describe a connoisseur of fine food or someone with a refined palate. **Avni Biyani, Concept Head, Foodhall**, the premium lifestyle food chain of Future Group, feels that a gourmet is someone who enjoys and understands the finer nuances and aspects of food. “Consumers are evolving and asking for exciting options in a new and interesting manner. As a brand specializing in the gourmet format, we are catering to Indians as well as expats who are well-travelled and well-versed with fine foods and have a refined palate.”



“As a brand specializing in the gourmet format, we are catering to Indians as well as expats who are well-travelled and well-versed with fine foods and have a refined palate.”

— Avni Biyani  
Concept Head, Foodhall

“The Indian customer profile is witnessing a rapid change. With over 400 million Gen-Z customers with better education levels, greater exposure to international markets/ travel, along with the penetration of smartphones/ internet and the media, customers today are more aware than ever before and are open to experimentation with food,” says **Rajeev Krishnan, MD & CEO, SPAR Hypermarkets**. “New-age Indians are travelling more within India and abroad, they are acquiring and developing their taste buds for various kinds of food. Also, cooking channels and reality cooking shows have become increasingly popular. Consumers want to eat and cook new cuisines more. There is also a large expatriate population in cities such as Delhi, Gurgaon, Bangalore, Mumbai and Pune who are already well-versed with gourmet foods,” observes Avni.

Industry observers agree that over the past few decades, the base of gourmet consumers in the country has swelled considerably. They point to the drawing cards responsible for the bulge in the number of gourmet consumers. “Growing aspirations, globalization, changing lifestyles and

growth of the organised retail sector along with augmented purchasing power of consumers are providing impetus to the gourmet category and to international food manufacturers in India,” says **R. Sankaranarayanan, Vice President - Buying & Merchandising, HyperCITY Retail (India) Ltd.**

According to Krishnan, “The efforts of Indian and international food companies in offering price-competitive products are helping to recruit an increasing number of customers into the segment.” Citing an example, he points to the number of Indian brands entering the olive oil and pasta segment at competitive prices and also offering customer education. “Such efforts bring in the first-time customers. We are also witnessing increasing quality and ingredient consciousness, which is spurring customers to demand better and more.”





**SPAR is a very well-known international brand and the natural choice of many expatriate communities who shop gourmet products. With a strong assortment, great quality, attractive price and unbeatable service, we also become a preferred choice for brands to drive their offerings.**

— **Rajeev Krishnan**  
MD & CEO, SPAR  
Hypermarkets



By one industry estimate, the Indian gourmet food market was expected to have crossed USD 2,800 million by 2015, and is reckoned to be growing at a CAGR of 20 per cent. Says **Vikas D Nahar, MD, Satvikk International**, which operates the health food brand Happilo: “The gourmet market in India is approximately worth Rs. 15,000 crore and growing at the rate of 20% per year. If we compare the Indian gourmet industry with that of the US, it is approximately 10% of the US industry. This offers enormous scope for growth considering the population difference between both countries.”

There is no disputing the fact that India is now an attractive market for gourmet and international food products thanks to the constellation of various forces in recent years. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of international cuisine, and their palates are ready and willing to taste and test a lot more. As both Krishnan and Sankaranarayanan observe, the growth in consumer interest and demand for category

has impelled many more foreign manufacturers to enter the gourmet and international food segment and bring their merchandise to India as well.

#### **Evolution of gourmet category**

With so much happening and at stake, there have been subtle and significant changes in the market for gourmet and international foods category in India. “With increased appetite of Indians to experiment with various cuisines, gourmet food retailing in India is now moving to the next level,” points out Avni. True to her observations, the retail space for this food category has witnessed rapid expansion as well as transformation in recent years. From the traditional, low-cost products dominating this category until about a decade ago, there is now a profusion of premium upgrades to products such as Washington apples, Australian Kiwifruit, Swiss chocolates, French cheese, Italian pastas and more.

Twenty years ago, buying gourmet foods meant — more often than not — ingredients, either raw materials or processed foods like olive oil, pasta, and so forth. Today, it is as likely to mean a ready-made sauce or marinade, or in some cases, a ready-to-eat dish made from high-quality, often organic ingredients using traditional recipes from the international lexicon. Products such as chocolates, cookies, juices, pasta, olive oil, honey, sauces and salad dressings and certain fruits and vegetables are prime categories constituting the bulk of the gourmet and international foods market in India today. Apart from these categories, ingredients such as truffles, artichokes, asparagus, Australian lamb and Norwegian salmon have found their way into the Indian food and beverage space.



Consumer receptivity to gourmet products has touched off in a big way also because of the dynamic growth of the natural and health food industry and its cross-fertilization with the gourmet food industry. In fact, this has brought about a greater involvement in gourmet on the part of mainstream food marketers. Growing synergy between the natural and gourmet foods industries coupled with other factors like an expanding retail distribution plus the convenience of products like bottled water, RTD beverages, bagged salads, and refrigerated 'supermarket sushi' are all paving the way for urban Indians to adopt tastes from all over the world.

Another significant development favorable to the growth and expansion of the gourmet market has been the emergence of large natural food chains featuring organic produce. In the past two decades, hundreds and thousands of such stores have sprung up across all parts of the country. In their wake, consumers have found themselves facing a plethora of novel choices that did not exist earlier. From fresh baked goods, hormone-free meats, an assortment of cheeses from dairies using organic farming principles to a wide variety of dry grocery products, these products cut at the intersection of the natural and gourmet foods industries. And the stores hawking these products resemble far more the highly visible upscale gourmet independent grocery than the more stark and sterile environment of the more traditional health food



store. The variety of offerings, the creative merchandising, the focus on freshly prepared foods and even the product mix serve to draw gourmet and specialty foods consumers.

The merger between the gourmet and natural/ organic products industries — now nicely established — has resulted in an explosion of food styles, options and variety, which has definitely raised the bar of food retailing in India. Just look at the developments in the natural products arena, where manufacturers have been busy making organoleptic improvements to their products. It has led to the development of better flavors, textures, colors, and aromas. Soy-based foods and drinks serve as a prime example of "natural done better" and are now accepted by even the pickiest palates for retail and home shelves.

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# Less regulatory baggage for importers now

Progressive Grocer India spoke to two leading importers to find out the industry sentiment on import regulations and how importers are engaging with FSSAI to address pending issues.



“  
**Over the past few years, FSSAI has moved toward engaging with the trade more vigorously and the results have been positive.**

— **Rakesh Banga**  
Founder Partner,  
Farmland Premium  
Foods LLP and Founder  
Director, Forum of Indian  
Food Importers



“  
**Both the importers as well as FSSAI have developed a mutual understanding for ensuring food safety compliance.**

— **Rishabh Asrani**  
Director  
Sri Roda Foods

**A couple of years ago, there was a lot of regulatory heat on importers on the issue of food safety. What is the situation now?**

**Rakesh Banga, Founder Partner, Farmland Premium Foods LLP and Founder Director, Forum of Indian Food Importers:** Laws in every society evolve over time and it takes continuous interaction between the regulator and stake holders to ensure that the laws are in the best interest of all. Initially, some of the rules introduced by FSSAI had created a scare in the trade industry. That was because the industry was unprepared for their implementation. But over the past few years, FSSAI has moved to engaging with the trade more vigorously and the results have been positive. However, there's still a long way to go in aligning our rules with Codex, which is the world body for foods standards.

**Rishabh Asrani, Director, Sri Roda Foods:** All rules take time to be accepted by the people and it took us some time before we could incorporate those new rules by FSSAI. In the past couple of years, we have adapted well to the rules on printing of production date, expiry date and the lot number. We are complying with all mandatory requirements by putting the information on the label and adhering to all the regulatory norms.

**To what extent has the scenario changed on these two fronts:**

(a) Stricter norms for food safety compliance by importers and (b) simplifying the rules to make it easier for importers to do business.

**Rakesh Banga:** Compliance norms for importers and FSSAI norms on imported foods have been reasonably rationalized over the years and are mostly based on scientific and international standards. Rules are being simplified to make it easier for importers to do business.

Framing and applying rules are two different aspects of regulation. FSSAI has been engaging with the trade on a regular basis and it has been seeking our inputs for drafting of the regulatory guidelines. However, it would be more helpful to have interactions on the framing of rules as well.

**Rishabh Asrani:** Both the importers as well as FSSAI have developed a mutual understanding for ensuring food safety compliance. In fact, we try to fulfill all the requirements as far as possible and we appreciate FSSAI cooperating with the importers.

**Which are the specific areas where you feel that the FSSAI can do more to liberalize the regulatory framework. Which are the sticky areas for importers still?**

**Rakesh Banga:** I feel there is a need for an online interactive module on the FSSAI website, where traders can raise their queries and get the answers within a time frame. That would be of great help. Handling of food samples, especially of perishable products need to be fine-tuned and the process should be made more systematic – right from the withdrawal of samples till the time they are analyzed.

**Rishabh Asrani:** We feel the testing of products at the port could be done a bit faster. The delay and demurrage charges at the port are very high. On average, the testing of product takes about 6-7 days and we lose a lot of money to shipping companies for such delays, which also increase the costing of our products.

**What has been the rate of growth of imported and gourmet food products to India in the past couple of years and how do you see this market's potential in the coming years?**

**Rakesh Banga:** The Make in India initiative has contributed to more imports of raw materials, ingredients and intermediates as compared to value-added consumer products. A 25 to 30 per cent growth on a year-on-year basis would be a reasonable projection for the coming years.

**Rishabh Asrani:** The growth rate of imported and gourmet food products to India has been on an incline with more people experimenting with different cuisines. Growing awareness among consumers has led to an increase in the demand of gourmet food from across the globe.

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**Growing aspirations, globalization, changing lifestyles and growth of organized retail along with augmented purchasing power of consumers are providing impetus to the gourmet category.**

— **R. Sankaranarayanan**  
VP - Buying & Merchandising, HyperCITY Retail (India) Ltd.

The natural and organic category's phenomenal growth and merge with the world of gourmet has meant that today more gourmet products are using natural and organic ingredients (and appealing to consumers' social consciences by offering products that are good for the environment and for the workers who produce them). At the same time, more natural foods retailers are carrying upscale, gourmet food and beverage items that meet their quality standards.

### Urban India drives gourmet's growth

Who are the big buyers of gourmet and international foods in India? Urban residents are by and large the major regulars of gourmet food in India. This is because urban populations have higher earnings when compared to their rural equivalents and spend over 40 per cent of their income on food alone, enhancing the quality of products consumed. "The biggest buyers for gourmet and international products are consumers who are well travelled, experience seekers (not only



price), aspirational, cosmopolitan and digitally aware. We identify and categorize them as PIKU customers who are young individuals with rising incomes and high purchasing power. They are experimental and love to explore and experience new cuisines and products," says Sankaranarayanan of HyperCITY.

**Amit Lohani, MD, Max Foods and Convenor at Forum of Indian Food Importers**, says: "The best performing markets for gourmet, international and imported foods remain the metros like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad. The consumption pattern is based on how adventurous and versatile the market is and wherever there is exposure you will find an increase in the consumption of gourmet, international and imported foods." He cites the example of Hyderabad which, until a few years ago, was not a big market but has now become one. "Wherever the IT industry is present, and where there is a high concentration of professionals, the international category is picking up. Demand is also picking up in small towns like Indore. It was earlier

restricted to commodity products like Pringles, Ferrero Rocher and Red Bull. But now people in these areas are going to the secondary level of food, and are trying out different kinds of pasta sauces, cheeses and high-end confectionery items. The North and the West are more willing to experiment with their food as compared to the South and East," observes Lohani.



According to a study by Mintel, people are willing to spend more money on gourmet gifts for special occasions through personal commitments, such as paying extra for organic or all-natural foods, or simply for their own indulgence. Additionally, more venues are now open to them where they can purchase these products. Where one could formally only buy gourmet products at specialty stores, today you find many of the same products at supermarkets, natural food stores, airport shops, online retailers, mass merchandisers, and big-box stores.

The category's core target audience is in the age group 16-40 years, comprising people with exposure to taste, familiarity in the usage of gourmet products, and willingness to pay a premium for better culinary taste. Apart from the urban elite consumers, hotels and restaurants are the other major consumers of gourmet food products in India. International cuisine restaurants are opening up in every neighborhood of top metro cities and offerings of seasoned international variants such as Peking duck with Ossetra caviar, Kanzuri shrimp, JamóIbérico Pata Negra – the gourmet ham sourced from acorn-fed pigs – and contemporary sushi can be savored at a number of fine dining speciality restaurants.

"India has a very young population willing to experiment and flirt with new cuisines. "Increasing health and nutrition awareness has made gourmet food a huge opportunity in the country. The growing number of Indians coming back from abroad and the expatriate population in the country are also constantly demanding newer specialised products such as gourmet cheeses, artisanal breads, and so



**Wherever the IT industry is present, and where there is a high concentration of professionals, the International category is picking up.**

— **Amit Lohani**  
MD, Max Foods and Convenor at Forum of Indian Food Importers





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**Under the imported items we have added kitchenware and have also brought in more breakfast cereals. The contribution of organic food to our sales is 18-20 per cent, and it has been increasing every quarter.**

— **Hitesh Arora**  
Director, Kipps Mart

on. This is going to increase consumption. Also, especially in the metros, with time and space reducing, women are outsourcing a lot of kitchen activities. Thus, categories such as pastes, sauces, chutneys, peeled and chopped vegetables, curries and other value-added products are now hot-sellers. Juxtaposed against these trends defining urban India, gourmet food retailing is only going to get bigger in the country,” affirms Foodhall’s Avni.

#### **Retailers’ approach to gourmet**

Riding on the back of a booming economy and rising income levels of consumers, gourmet and international foods retailing is on way to becoming the new wave in India. To leverage its growing market potential, retailers are allocating greater shelf space to the category, and expanding their product ranges. Leading food and grocery chains known for their gourmet assortment such as Foodhall, Godrej Nature’s Basket, HyperCITY and SPAR Hypermarkets host a line of premium and niche products in the gourmet and international category. “We stock everything one can expect to find at any international food store. Our offerings at Foodhall range from tomatillo (green tomatoes of Mexico) to gluten-free breads such as pizza dough, bagels to a range of super-food options such as Greek yoghurts, fat-free organic milk, tofu, gourmet chocolates, oils and vinegars, smoked salmon, mock meats, specialty cold cuts, teas, fresh truffles and various food delights including a variety of Indian foods,” points out Avni.

“In the gourmet category, we stock an exotic assortment of authentic food products across



## POWERHOUSE OF FOOD EXPORTS

**Chile** is a country with great natural and human potential. The country boasts of the most transparent sky on Earth and possesses some of the world’s most significant freshwater reserves. Natural barriers protect Chile, converting it into a true phytosanitary island, thereby reducing the infestation of pests and diseases. A place of amazing geographical and climatic contrasts, Chile’s unique characteristics lend it unrivalled conditions for producing fresh, pure, healthy, good quality food, which is appreciated around the world.

The country is blessed with a varied range of climates but its Mediterranean climate has enabled Chile to become a major food producer. It is the world’s biggest exporter of blueberries, grapes, cherries, prunes, dehydrated apples, frozen whole salmon and mussels. It is the world’s second-biggest exporter on shelled walnuts, fresh plums, fresh salmon fillet and unshelled hazelnuts. And it is the world’s third biggest exporter of raisin, frozen raspberries, grape juice and insulin.

Chile plays a key role in the global food industry and is a reliable supplier of safe, healthy food, which meets the high standards demanded by international consumers. Food products from Chile are leaders in their categories and are set become the market leaders with a continuous rise in their value. Wines, kiwifruit, apples, plums, olive oil, pork, different types of seafood and Pisco are some of the other popular exports from Chile.

categories like cheese, condiments, breakfast foods/ ingredients, beverages, processed foods, bakery items, canned foods, wines, varieties of olive oil, international sauces, pulses and flour sourced from a variety of places around the world. Amongst international cuisine, we house Thai, Japanese, Mexican and Mediterranean ingredients and products in stores,” says Sankaranarayanan.

Similarly, SPAR, whose credo “Celebrate the World” is in keeping with its motto of establishing the popularity of gourmet and international foods across the country, promotes popular cuisines of the world. As SPAR has a footprint in over 40 countries, it is able to ensure the exchange of lots of ideas and products and leverage them toward the enhancement of its assortment. “We stock a wide range of gourmet



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“  
**Almost 60 per cent of the products stocked in our store are imported products. The categories that are really working are chocolates, breakfast cereals and sauces, like pasta sauces.**

— **Kunaal Kumar**  
 Owner, Modern Bazaar

and international products ranging from cheese, olive oil, pastas, salad dressings, exotic/ imported fruits, vegetables, conserves/ preserves and seafood to name a few,” states Krishnan, adding that SPAR is a natural choice of many expat communities who shop gourmet products. “With a strong assortment, great quality, attractive price and unbeatable service, we also become a preferred choice for brands to drive their offerings. All this helps us redefine the conventional customer segmentation and offer choices to all our customers.”

The assortment and shelf space for gourmet foods at top retailers varies according to the demand for different product categories and the season. For instance, every SPAR store offers a customized assortment to meet the needs of the local clientele, and this determines the authority of gourmet play, which varies with every catchment. As every store assortment is curated for the particular catchment, there is no single size fits all approach to any category, including gourmet. The assortment also varies largely with the categories and season. “When we bet on imported Kiwis or celebrate Italian food festival in a particular season, the space allotted naturally goes up. We use a combination of areas – some are permanently earmarked and some are celebratory areas used to amplify the festival or cuisine. We are always on the lookout for countries/ partners who would like to “Celebrate the World” with us and create specific festivals together,” reveals Krishnan.

While gourmet and international products are present across all modern trade stores in some form or the other, the shelf space allocated to the category is comparatively higher at specialist retailers. “About 60 per cent of the shelf space at Foodhall stores is occupied by gourmet and international range,” discloses Avni. At Kipps Mart in Ludhiana, almost 60 per cent of the products are imported foods. The non-imported items are the fresh produce range, pulses and the bakery section. Says **Hitesh Arora, Director, Kipps Mart**, “Brands such as Coca-Cola, Kraft, Cadbury, Silk, American Garden, Twinning’s, Monin, Real, Tropicana, Trident, Lindt, Lays, 24 Mantra, Eco life, Whole Food and our own bakery products are the most in demand. Under the



BEST SELLING HIGH-VALUE PRODUCTS	
Product Types	Market Attractiveness
Nuts (mainly Almonds)	High demand and growing retail Industry
Cocoa and cocoa preparations	Strong quality and brand preference
Products of the milling industry, malt, starches, insulin, wheat gluten	Growing bakery, retail industry and increased popularity for processed food
Pulses	Local production is inadequate and more than 20% of total demand for pulses is met through imports.
Apples, pears and quinces fresh	Seasonal shortages and high prices, increasing interest in quality fruits and growth of organized retail
Grapes fresh	Seasonal shortages and high prices, increasing interest in quality fruits and growth of organized retail
Pasta	Increasing popularity
Fruit juices	Increasing health awareness and shortage of quality products
Sauces, preparations, mixed condiments & seasonings	Preference for imported brands and growing food processing sector
Beverages, spirits and vinegar	Growing consumption and lack of domestic production

Source: USDA, India Exporter Guide

imported items, we have added kitchenware and have also brought in more breakfast cereals.” The most noticeable emerging trend at the store is the increasing demand for organic and natural products. “It is the new market trend with a good business potential. We are trying to create greater customer awareness for this category through various in-store initiatives,” informs Arora, adding that the organic market is growing at a pace of 25-30 per cent per annum but is expected to cross 65 per cent (approx.) in another decade or so. “The contribution of organic food to our sales is 18-20 per cent, and it has been increasing every quarter,” he discloses.

**Kunaal Kumar, Owner, Modern Bazaar** stores in Delhi-NCR, says, “Almost 60 per cent of the products stocked in our store are imported products. The categories that are really working are chocolates, breakfast cereals and sauces, like pasta sauces. Products from the US and Europe like pasta and pasta sauces, chocolates, etc, are extremely popular with the consumers. Though Asian cuisine was not as popular earlier, awareness is increasing and we now see people stocking up on Japanese products like wasabi and sushi. Every year, the demand for imported foods increases by 10-15 percent.” Modern

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over the years. In the international/ imported category, dairy imports – cheese, creams and dips – are witnessing increasing demand. The imported dairy market is led by products from New Zealand and Australia; these two destinations form 85 per cent of the total foreign dairy products in India. Other emerging destinations for dairy imports are Denmark, France and China with impressive growth rates. The wine sector is another fast growing import category in India with France, Italy, Australia and Singapore being the main sourcing countries. The packaged food segment too is growing at a fast pace with products like sauces, pastas, chocolates and cocoa products being the major sales drivers. Chocolates and cocoa products contribute a hefty share of the total packaged imported food market in India. Singapore, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Italy are the major destinations for chocolates and cocoa preparation in India. Fruits, vegetables and nuts are also among the major contributors to the imported food basket of India. According to FIFI's Amit Lohani, "We see a lot of exotic fruits coming in like wild berries and cranberries. A lot of Italian products like truffles are very popular. Cuisines of Japan and South America are also gaining popularity."



Bazaar offers a mix of international and national brands along with a healthy portion of its private labels, mainly bakery items such as pastries, muffins and breads, with the last doing exceptionally well, according to Kunaal.

At HyperCITY, 20% of the total shelf space is dedicated to the gourmet and international category, which pulls in about five per cent of the retailer's overall revenue. However, it is targeting to take the revenue share from this segment to 10% + in the next six months. The retailer is banking on regular promotions, multiple displays, sampling and hosting international food festivals and other planned activities along similar lines to accelerate sales growth in its stores, which is currently 15% year-on-year. "We aim to grow at more than 100% with our changing marketing strategies, visual merchandising and, most importantly, the assortment of our current products and the ones in the pipeline. We also aim to be a 10% sales contributor of only international brands in our overall food business portfolio," reveals Sankaranarayanan. He believes that strategic range overview and category-wise business plan is what makes each category perform and deliver growth and says that HyperCITY closely monitors the quality, taste and variety of its assortment to drive its customers into making the purchasing decision. "To be abreast with the competition, we ensure that we stock fresh and updated range of products that are the latest in trend."

“  
**What makes Cornitos different is its unique preparation and healthy ingredients. Our Nacho Crisps are cooked in healthier corn oil, which no other brand is using.**

— Vikram Agarwal  
 Director, Greendot Health Foods Pvt. Ltd.

In terms of product demand in the gourmet and international foods category, the consumer preference is shifting to more exotic ingredients and foods acclaimed for their authenticity and virtuosity. For instance, the synthetic Mozzarella is slowly being replaced with the sharp-flavored Parmesan and broccoli is favored over the traditional cauliflower. An increasingly health-conscious consumer segment is propelling the olive oil market in India. Brands like Leonardo, Cola Vita, Bertolli and Fragata etc., which were known only to five star hotels until a couple of years ago, are today easily available through retail outlets. The olive oil market is growing at a rate of 45%-50% annually. Health attributes – such as the absence of cholesterol – are the considerations driving an increased consumption of olive oil by affluent Indian households. Given their rising aspiration for the finer things in life, urban Indians are scouting for ways to get a taste of the world in their own kitchens.

The growing popularity of gourmet cheese in India is largely due to the increasing exposure to the world. Gourmet cheeses, along with olive oil,

**Best categories**

There are quite a few gourmet and international products that have been attracting good demand



have truly arrived in the Indian market and are well accepted by the affluent and middle class. The imported cheese market in India is growing at a rate of 30% and cheeses varieties like Haloumi, Fiore Sardo or Flower of Sardinia, Parmigiano Reggiano, Stilton, Provolone, Mozzarella, Roquefort, Gruyere, Camembert, Feta, etc., can be spotted in retail outlets across the metros.

Pasta is one of the most popular items in the gourmet foods category along with olive oil and cheeses. The universal popularity of Italian cuisine and the emergence of organized retail have boosted the consumption of imported pasta in India. The market size of pasta is expected to grow by 25-30% annually. Barilla, De Cecco and San Remo are the most popular brands of imported pastas.

With urbanization and change in eating habits, sauces and condiments have occupied a substantial shelf space in the Indian gourmet outlets. While mayonnaise, ketchup and olives are the most popular, others such as chilli, soya, gherkins, etc., have also gained wide acceptance. The growing demand for sauces and condiments comes from both individual customers as well as institutions such as hotels, restaurants and clubs. Heinz, Tabasco, Remia, Barilla, Prego are some of the famous imported brands.

Apart from these high volume driven categories in gourmet space, there are newer products/ categories that are being increasingly adopted by the Indian consumer. These include fresh/ frozen berries, greek yogurts, preserved lemons, yuzu fruit (east Asian fruit - hybrid mix of mandarin, orange and lemon), tangines (vessel to cook Moroccan dishes), salad leafs (radicchio, kale, Chinese lettuce, arugula, watercress), grains (quinoa and couscous), egg replacements (200 gm pack is equal to 66 eggs), gluten-free foods and processed butter. "There is a huge demand for gluten-free, health foods, and specialty foods. People are also looking out for a lot of international flavors. The international range helps introduce different kinds of South American and European flavors in the Indian market like sea salt, wasabi flavors and Tom Yum (Thai), and they are doing really well," says Lohani.

In line with the popular cuisines of the world, retailers are stocking gourmet items to mesh with today's flavor trends, whether those trends are current or emerging. "At our SPAR stores, Italian foods are witnessing excellent growth. We are seeing good



interest and traction in Mexican foods as well. Asian foods have always enjoyed popularity and customers are trying out new categories and quite open to experimentation. Categories like olive oil, pasta, exotic vegetables and imported fruits are also seeing good growth. In the branded offering space, the growth is also fueled by the active participation of the Indian brands, which help in recruiting customers to this space," informs Krishnan. Explaining the growth and performance of the different categories, he says: "The growth of product categories is

very specific to the locale. In certain locations, we are even clocking a strong high double digit growth. The stores in metro cities are leading the growth for us in categories like olive oil, exotic fruits/ vegetables, etc. However, the stores in cities like Mangalore and Coimbatore are driving recruitment of new customers in categories like pasta, and culinary items where we see a lot of participation from Indian companies in offering products that are price competitive."

HyperCITY, which exclusively retails UK's leading brand Waitrose in India, plays to the cachet that international products bring to its urban and aspirational customers. "The 'imported' tag and the brag factor associated with foreign products remains an attractive proposition for the upwardly mobile customers. We retail a vast international product line, which is one of the major reasons why our customers come back to us for their daily food requirements," points out Sankaranarayanan. He says



“

**We, at Happilo, are one of the largest importers of dry fruits and dried fruits in southern India. Happilo stands for delivering quality food products of International standards.**

— Vikas D Nahar  
MD, Satvik International

➔

CHALLENGES FOR IMPORTERS

- High import duties and aligned tariffs
- Lack of infrastructure support
- Supply chain constraints
- Stringent laws for food
- Diverse food habits across the nation
- Preference for fresh and traditional foods
- Affordability vs availability of similar or better products at competitive prices
- Sourcing
- Multiple authorities and ambiguity with rules

that HyperCITY's leading suppliers for gourmet and international foods are Waitrose, Tree of Life, Suresh Kumar & Co., Pearl Foods, United Distributors, L-Comps & Impex Private Limited and Saksham Impex Private Limited. "Chocolates, biscuits & savories, soups and juices are the products that have shown good momentum at our stores. Also, 'Free From' (free from sugar, free from gluten, free from lactose) is the category showing a lot of promise and from which we foresee good growth."



**Our main focus is on European foods, imported mainly from Italy and Spain and our main brands include Figaro, Campagna, Italian Garden, Varvello, Novi, Sica, Duchef, and San Marcos.**

— **Deepak Asrani**  
MD, Sri Roda Foods

Fruits & veggies, cheese, chocolates and cuisine-based products are the best-selling products at Foodhall, which earns 60% to 70% of its revenue from the gourmet and international foods. The chain is betting big on superfoods becoming the next big thing in the category. "The superfoods category will see the maximum demand in the future. Also, special dietary requirement foods, which include vegan and gluten-free products, are the next big trend we will get to see," says Avni. As the health and wellness trend will likely gain more momentum in the days ahead due to better consumer awareness, retailers are responding to meet the evolving needs of the customer. "At SPAR, we are seeing a lot of consciousness about health and wellness. We see a lot of energy in this space. Healthy snacking is gaining huge popularity. The entire space is getting a lot of traction and products like 'Trail mixes', dried exotic fruits and nuts are gaining in demand. We also find a lot of experimentation in sauces – both pure as well as fusion – with Indian flavors meeting international ingredients. There will be a lot of experimentation happening in this space over the next 3–5 years," predicts Krishnan.

#### **Innovation drivers in the gourmet category**

Through a deeper understanding of the trends and product profiles that satisfy the gourmet shoppers' desire for the unique and interesting, manufacturers, and importers are helping to drive a new wave of innovation in the market. Some of these players are:

**Greendot Health Foods Pvt. Ltd.** was the first company to launch Nacho Crisps in Indian snacks under the brand name Cornitos. The brand has since grown to include many more exciting and interesting product ranges under its banner. The flagship product is Cornitos nacho crisps, which commands more than 70% market share in the category in India. Cornitos nacho crisps is a Mexican snack in international flavors catering to the Indian palate. It is gluten-free and a zero trans-fat snack that comes in



11 exotic flavors. "What makes Cornitos different is its unique preparation and healthy ingredients. Our Nacho Crisps are cooked in healthier corn oil, which no other brand is using," says **Vikram Agarwal, Director**, Greendot Health Foods Pvt. Ltd. Corn is a good source of fiber and has digestive benefits, which make nachos the perfect healthy snack choice. The nitrogen-flushed technique keeps the product fresh for months: Cornitos nachos have a shelf life of six months.

Apart from Nacho Crisps, Cornitos' brand portfolio covers products such as taco shells, specialty sauces, roasted nuts - cashews & almonds, coated green peas and pickles - jalapeno peppers & gherkins. These products belong to distinct product ranges and are known for their characteristic features. But the overarching feature of all Cornitos products is their health attribute. "Cornitos is for everyone. It's a healthy choice and for people from all age groups and all walks of life," says Vikram. Cornitos products are available pan-India in retail, e-retail and modern trade stores. They are also available for Institutional sales across airlines, Horeca, multiplexes and cafes. The sales contribution is 38% from modern trade, 57% from general trade and 5% from online. Currently, Cornitos products are available in 300 tier I and II cities through a network of over 30,000 plus retailers. The company has embarked on a rapid





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**We started with the import of culinary herbs and re-packed the same under the brand name 'Verdew', which was a novel product a bit ahead of its time for the Indian market.**

— **Pranay Gambhir**  
Director, P&N Business  
Ventures Pvt. Ltd.



expansion of its distribution network to grow its products in tier III towns as well.

Cornitos range of salsa dips is made from farm fresh ingredients and is available in two variants – hot and mild and the recently launched fruity version – pineapple salsa with real chunks of fresh pineapple. Cornitos “Do It Yourself” range includes four-inch crunchy taco shells made of non-GMO corn, cooked in corn oil and “Just Heat and Eat” Cornitos refried beans. The company has recently launched new variants in taco shells – spinach garlic taco shells in green color and beetroot chili taco shells in red color.

Cornitos Pop N Crunch range includes premium cashew, California almond and exotic coated green peas, processed in the latest technology in imported roasting line. The range is available in six variants but another fresh variant – roasted seeds in premium category – will be made available soon.

The company recently launched a new flavor in Nacho Crisps- Cheesy Sour Cream and Onion, which is a popular flavor all over the world. “The brand will keep making continuous efforts to foray into segments that interest its target audience. We have a couple of new products coming up later this year. It would include an extension of Nacho Crisps range in 30 gm packs, tricolour Nachos, premium seeds and nuts mixes, Cantina style round Nachos and many more, reveals Vikram.

**Satvikk International**, a part of Jain India Group, operates the health food gourmet brand

Happilo, which offers a complete range of nuts, dried fruits and fusion food, including homegrown and imported products. Headquartered in Bangalore, the company enjoys over four decades of experience in the food industry, dealing in an exclusive range of dry fruits, dried fruits, spices, healthy seeds, trial mixes, festive gift hampers and more. “We, at Happilo, are one of the largest importers of dry fruits and dried fruits in southern India. Happilo stands for delivering quality food products of international standards. In the past year of operations, we have not received even a single quality complaint. We have been producing and distributing quality nuts and spices since 1969. With a wide variety of products that cater to every budget and taste, our best sellers have found their way into the homes and hearts of many households. We have a complete range of imported dry fruits, dried fruits, berries and spices in international quality and world class packaging,” says **Vikas D Nahar, MD**, Satvikk International.

Happilo products have been well received in the market. Its exotic range of dry fruits and unique products, which are a fusion of nuts, dried fruits and healthy seeds have become the best sellers in its product catalog. Its Brazil nuts, Macadamia nuts, or the recently launched exclusive mixes of exotic dry fruits, dried fruits and health seeds have all been successful in attracting the attention of health-savvy consumers. “We are striving to give our customers the largest and best collection of dry fruits, dried fruits and health seeds and working on the extra range of exotic dry fruits and dried fruits in our state of the art facilities which has capacity of producing upto 40000 units per day,” points out Nahar.

Happilo products are majorly targeted at youths in age range of 25 to 45. But being a health food brand, its products are relevant for all those who want to keep themselves healthy. “The best advantage that we have over others is we never compromise with the quality at any cost and have a lot of unique products. We travel the world to procure the very best nuts, dry fruits, dried fruits and healthy seeds. We have a state-of-the-art production facility with ISO 22000 & HACCP certifications. Also, we have a strong distribution network with 500+ stores in 15 cities and are available on all major e-commerce portals,” says Nahar, adding that Happilo products are known for having the best quality and taste and have contributed to the top selling range of various online and offline retailers. “We started with basic range of dry fruits and dried fruits initially and currently have 34 varieties of health foods. The brand is available with almost all top retailers, be it online platforms like Amazon, Bigbasket, Flipkart, Zopnow or offline

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stores like HyperCITY, Westside, SPAR, Nilgiris, Foodworld, D-Mart and other major modern trade outlets including those in general trade.

As far as sales are concerned, it is fairly distributed across all the three channels. About 45% of the sales come from modern trade whereas online channels contribute to 30% of its sales with the balance 25% sales coming from general trade, which is being expanded rapidly to further improve percentage share from it. All major metro cities and tier 1 cities are key markets for Happilo products. "Though we have access to each and every corner of India via e-commerce, we are developing a strong distribution channels to make our products available in each and every format across the nation. Currently, we have 10 super-stockists, 12 distributors and tie-ups with 500+ stores in 15 cities. At the pace we are expanding, we will reach in 2,000+ retail stores shortly," says Nahar.

The company has clocked 20%+ growth rate every month for the previous year and is sure of notching up even higher numbers on the back of its various product innovations and its all-out efforts to penetrate the market even deeper. "We are into all kinds of ATL and BTL activities and always try to connect with our customers with exclusive offers via our online and offline partners. We do print advertisement during festive seasons and continuously do active social media marketing aimed at virality. We ensure the availability of our products at all of our POS, enabling customers to collect what they want. We have also done many samplings to educate the customers about our new launches," explains Nahar.

On the company's radar are many opportunities to grow and expand. "We, at Happilo, are also exploring opportunities overseas. Soon you will see us rocking the whole world. We are looking for expansion to every corner there is no limit to our growth. We are absolutely not looking to limit the possibility of our growth opportunities," says Nahar and states that



**Brand On1y has been specially developed keeping in mind the Indian food culture. On1y spices distil the best of industry practices, systematic processes, stringent quality measures and long-term research on innovative packaging.**

— Viren Desai  
AVP, Brand Head, On1y



the company is also striving to keep gourmet items within the pockets of the consumers. "At Happilo, we try hard to promote gourmet foods and health foods with our affordable range and will continue to do so. Our range of Happilo snack packs starts at Rs. 25 and offers a healthy alternative to our consumers."

**Sri Roda Foods** is a successor company of D.D. Industries and has been in the food business for the past 60 years. The company specializes in the imports of canned and packaged food products from all over the world. "Our main focus, however, is on European foods, imported mainly from Italy and Spain and our main brands include Figaro, Campagna, Italian Garden, Varvello, Novi, Sica, Duchef, and San Marcos," says **Deepak Asrani, MD**, Sri Roda Foods. The company mostly caters to the institutional segment, including five star hotels and fine dining restaurants. However, some of its products are available in retail as well. Its brands, especially Figaro and its Italian Garden products command a strong presence in market. In recent years, Sri Roda has introduced several new products, including a wide variety of canned beans and vegetables from Italy. The company has taken various initiatives to introduce healthier products in the market. It already has gluten-free polenta and couscous in its portfolio, for which there is a growing demand. Also, the company is seeing an increasing demand for gourmet mushrooms like truffles, porcini & morels.

"Sales of imported food products have been on a rise. However, we are getting tough competition from local producers in India imitating the products," says Deepak. To reach its clients, Sri Roda relies on its



wide network of distributors. Sri Roda products are available in all A & B tier cities and even in smaller towns where it has wholesale market customers. “Modern trade has been helpful in reaching new customers throughout the country. Post GST, we hope for stability in the market and expect the demand and growth rate for our products to show a good inclining curve. Also, we hope to focus more on the online channels,” reveals Deepak, adding that the company is also looking to start local production of good quality food products and get into exports.

**P&N Business Ventures Pvt. Ltd.**, established in 2012, is based out of Chennai. In its earlier avatar, the company was known as P&N Foods and was one of the first set of importers when it began operations in 1999. “We started with the import of culinary herbs and re-packed the same under the brand name ‘Verdew’, which was a novel product a bit ahead of its



time for the Indian market,” says **Pranay Gambhir, Director**, P&N Business Ventures Pvt Ltd. The company is part of a bigger business group – Tan Business Ventures, which has under its fold other food businesses such as Splendid Fine Foods and online store coldkart.com

The company has introduced quite a few international products into the Indian market. This year, it launched one of China’s leading gourmet chilli-based sauces – Laoganma range – and is close to finalizing a couple of more Chinese cuisine products. It is also involved in secondary distribution of many imported foods and works closely with companies like Saksham Impex, Redbull, ITC, Wildwater, Danone, Perrier, Ferraro, Sprig and many more.

P&N’s own products are mainly targeted for the southern market especially Tamil Nadu but its secondary distribution imported products are aimed at an all India market. All its products are known for their exclusive taste profile and are more focused toward modern trade and online platforms.

The company works closely with top retailers and collaborates in terms of product promotion and to expand the reach of its products to the consumers. Monin & Redbull are its best-selling and most popular imported products. Gambhir believes that the market potential for gourmet and international foods in India is very promising. “The amplitude and penetration of Internet, YouTube, Master Chefs shows and the travel boom are all acting as demand drivers and encouraging everyone to try something different and authentic,” he says, adding that the growth and proliferation of online platforms has ensured that good food has no boundaries.

**On1y** is a young gourmet seasonings brand that came into the market in 2013. But it traces its lineage to its 77-year-old parent Jayanti – the agro-commodities business group. Capturing the essence of Herbs & Spice in grinder bottles and sprinkler tins, On1y is an honest attempt to bring the luxury of fresh ground spice to every household. “Brand On1y has been specially developed keeping in mind the Indian food culture. On1y identifies with the best of industry practices, systematic processes, stringent quality measures and long-term research on innovative packaging,” says **Viren Desai, AVP, Brand Head, On1y**.

The brand today encompasses twenty-one variants of gourmet seasonings and herb products, including Black Pepper, Roasted Garlic and Pink Salt, Meat Supreme, Pink Salt, All-purpose seasoning, Chilli flakes, Oregano, Basil and Parsley among others. “Italian seasoning, fruit seasoning and salad seasoning in grinder bottles and basil, oregano and mixed herbs in sprinkler tins are the most popular consumer choices. Our strongest markets are Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai,” reveals Desai. The company introduced a lifestyle gourmet product to cater to the new generation of globetrotters between the age of 25 and 45 years who love experimenting with exotic flavours and want to embrace healthy living. The aim is to offer a very high



“**Our product portfolio includes traditional Indian sweets, chocolates, dried fruit, Turkish delights, baklava and baked sweets. We are a fast growing brand and have established a strong network of more than 1,000 premium retailers and more than 20 distributors in India.**

— **Shaishav Mittal**  
Founder & CEO,  
Lovely Bake Studio





“  
**We promote healthy nuts and nutritious dried fruits like prunes, cranberries, etc. Our brands in the gourmet segment are Tulse, Gourmia and Magic Nuts with Gourmia Trail Mixes being the latest addition.**

— **Ritesh Bajaj**  
 Director, K.B.B. Nuts Pvt. Ltd.

quality hygienic product of international standards in ready-to-use format for today's youth. "India has a huge potential to absorb gourmet and imported food products. Living standards are improving; double income group is expanding and with increasing international travel, the craving for exotic food culture is increasing among the youth. With an increasing number of women joining the workforce along with the growth of disposable income, the gourmet and imported food segment is bound to grow," explains Desai, whose brand has been growing at a healthy clip of over 30% in the past three years.

On1y range of products offer a unique experience through their innovative functional packaging designs which is a promising start for any young brand; as gathered from feedback received from customers across India. The products packaged in glass bottles with grinder caps and sprinkler tins, blend sophistication with convenience. "The greatest advantage of On1y lies in single source handling of farm-to-fork quality. We have backward integration programs in herbs & spice farming. Processing is done in BRC A grade certified facilities, which are equipped with steam sterilizers to keep a check on bacterial contamination. It is a perfect recipe for every health-conscious consumer," states Desai. He says that the brand belongs to the category of premium and not me-too products. "They have been

consciously designed for the niche Indian consumer who values health, status and convenience," avers Desai. The brand is constantly working on building an extensive retail outreach. On1y products have a good presence in all major metros, apart from being

available in over 50 Indian cities. "We ensure that placement of our products is reasonably good in the premium stores. We have devised a novel strategy to attract niche consumers by displaying products and their potential uses using exclusive in-store POP collaterals," says Desai who is confident of his brand's steady pace of growth in the future. "We are growing at a steady pace and will continue to target quality consumers who value innovation and product integrity. The young breed of experimental consumers with international exposure will also drive the demand for our products significantly."

**Lovely Bake Studio** is a premier European inspired bakery, which offers its guests 100% egg-less delicacies, a first-of-its-kind concept in north India. Bolstering Lovely Bake Studio's presence in the food segment is its sibling, Lovely Sweets, a leading manufacturer and retailer of traditional Indian sweets, also in north India. "Our product range in both the brands performs extremely well in all formats. Cookies sell all the year round and sales of sweets range picks up during the festival season," says **Shaishav Mittal, Founder & CEO**, Lovely Bake Studio. The USP of Lovely products is that they are 100% eggless, high quality tasty products with each cookie packed individually in an attractive packaging. Lovely's egg-less cookies come packed in boxes of 75 gm, 200 gm and 400 gm. "Our product portfolio includes traditional Indian sweets, chocolates, dried fruit, Turkish delights, baklava and baked sweets. We have established a strong network of more than 1,000 premium retailers and more than 20 distributors in India," informs Mittal. Like Lovely's baked products, Lovely Sweets has been the preferred choice of sweets lovers since 1961 and enjoys a reputation for quality, creativity, variety and affordability.

The Lovely brand is widely accepted and remembered by consumers for its quality and taste. Lovely Bake Studio, which is ISO 9001- 2015 and ISO 22000 certified, has recently introduced Indian ethnic snacks, which include methi mathi, chakli, dry fruit kachori, bhakharbadi and many more delicacies. In addition, the company is also aggressively designing new gifting concepts for the upcoming festival season and will be introducing innovative gifting options for customers. The company is also developing a gluten-free range and low-calorie range of cookies. "Our existing products are manufactured using healthy ingredients such as oats, cornflakes, almonds, honey, cashew and pistachio," says Mittal pointing to the changing consumer behavior wherein today's educated and well travelled consumers are willing to try out new innovative products that normally big FMCG companies cannot manufacture.





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“They are willing pay a little more if the product is branded, healthy, nicely packed and hygienically manufactured,” asserts Mittal citing market reports and surveys that point to the fact that nowadays customers are bored of consuming regular biscuits and are looking for innovative functional cookies, which are healthy & tasty. “Our cookies are not only healthy but also give an international feel to any shelf/ end cap, wherever they are placed,” says Mittal, adding that 40% of the sales of Lovely’s baked products come from modern trade, another 40% from general trade and the rest from online sales.



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**We are promoting the health benefits of Canola oil through various mediums to create a healthy society and spread out our reach of healthy products to the masses. Canola oil is growing market as consumers are becoming more aware about the necessity to stay fit and healthy.**

— **Raman Khanna**  
 Director, Eon Naturals Pvt. Ltd.

The company, whose top retailers include WHSmith, Walmart, Easy Day & Godrej Nature’s Basket, has been adding new chains every month and launching its products in the existing chains in different states. “Since our products are premium range, we are currently selling in all major metro cities across India. We enter a new market by appointing at super-stockist who can supply to both GT and MT chains. We give promotional material and advertisement support to our buyers. In addition, we also appoint promoters to do wet sampling,” informs Mittal, adding that the cookies industry is growing annually by about 35%. “We have experienced more than 100% sales growth every year for the past three years. We are building up our pan-India presence and have also started exporting overseas to the Middle East and Hong Kong.

**KBB Nuts Pvt. Ltd.** is among the largest nuts and dry fruits business group in India and among the top importers. With over four decades of expertise in the nuts and dry fruits segment, the company offers a wide range of raw and flavored products for consumers, institutions,

HoReCa and other sales channels. “We promote healthy nuts and nutritious dried fruits like prunes, cranberries, etc. Our brands in the gourmet segment are Tulsi, Gourmia and Magic Nuts with Gourmia Trail Mixes being the latest addition. Tulsi is our flagship brand with almonds as our lead product,” says **Ritesh Bajaj, Director, K.B.B. Nuts Pvt. Ltd.** The company’s strongest market is north India but its products have a presence in most major cities and towns across India.

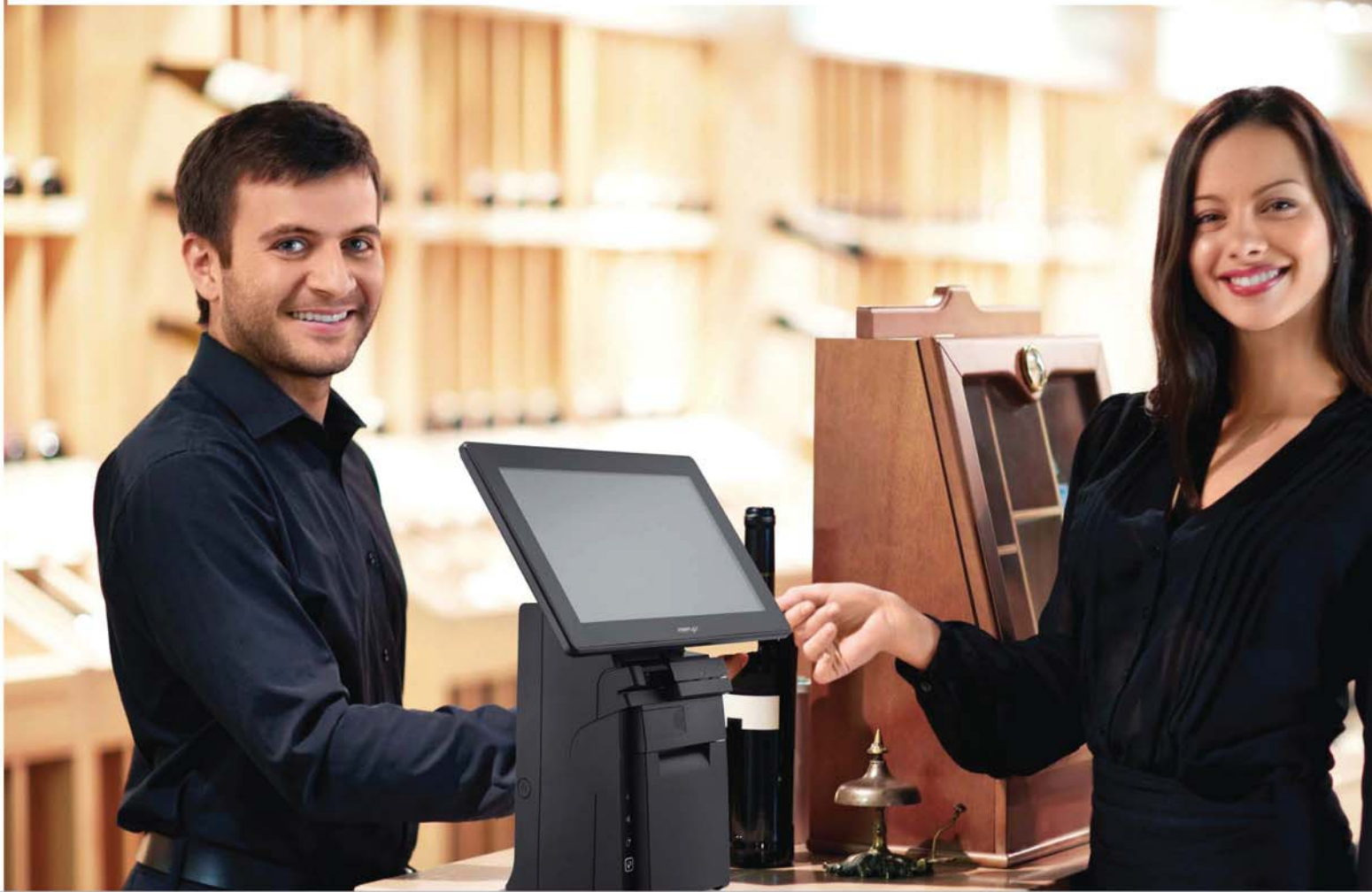
Increasing awareness of health needs on the part of consumers, growing disposable income levels, better availability of products, right packaging, consistency in the quality and adequate product communication (labelling) are some of the major reasons contributing to the growth of the nuts and dry fruits market. “The Indian dry fruits market is likely to double in the next four years on rising demand for healthy and nutritious food,” points out Bajaj, adding that this combination of factors is also fueling the demand for gourmet foods in India. “We see good demand for our products in the future because we are very consistent in maintaining product quality, have reasonable pricing and provide our products in contemporary packaging. Our flagship brand is Tulsi and its product range caters to the mass market as the product is consumed across all cultures and demographic segments. Our Gourmia brand serves niche buyers of roasted snacks and also the impulse category in dried fruits. The Magic Nuts brand caters to a small but daily snacking buyers,” says Bajaj, adding that the company is currently also focusing on medical stores, coffee shops and bars as new markets for its product range.

The company is rapidly building its sales team for providing better services across all sales channels. “We get good sales primarily through the conventional channels – modern + traditional trade. We are also offering our products on the company website and other online portals. B+ and above towns are our key markets. Reasonable pricing of products with increased retail outreach is the basic strategy for taking our products to newer markets and demographics,” informs Bajaj. To extend its retail outreach, K.B.B. Nuts has been collaborating with retailers through competitive pricing of its products, offering better margins and by beefing





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Our existing range of products includes quinoa grain, quinoa flour, gluten-free quinoa pasta and guilt-free quinoa chips. We have been developing new products category based out of quinoa, which is helping different category of users to start adopting quinoa in their lifestyle.”

— CA Manish Goyal  
Co-Founder,  
Queens Quinoa

up its distribution service. It conducts regular sampling drives to generate customer awareness for its products. “In terms of product demand, the consumer preference is slowly shifting and replacing the usual products on the kitchen shelf. Consumers are more open to exploring both traditional and modern health & lifestyle products. We are meeting this demand by offering good quality products at optimum prices sourced from the best suppliers around the world,” says Bajaj. He believes that dry fruits as a category needs a two-pronged approach at retail level to grow to its full potential. The first step, he says, is to promote daily consumption of raw and healthy products as staples. The second measure is for manufacturers to offer value-added nuts and dried fruits that carry the blends of health & taste. “In my opinion, there is a need for driving home the message to modern trade that nuts and dry fruits need to be placed in both the staples and FMCG sections of the store in keeping with the nature of the product.”

**Eon Naturals Pvt. Ltd.**, established in 2012, is a prominent importer and supplier of refined edible canola oil. Canola oil comes from the crushed seeds of the canola plant. It is part of the Brassica family. Cabbages, broccoli and cauliflower are also part of the same botanical family. The name “Canola” is a contraction of “Canadian” and “ola”, which means oil. Canola oil is the produce of Canada, and suppliers like Eon Naturals are importing the product from Canada itself, which ensures that the quality is guaranteed. One serving of canola oil each day delivers about a quarter of all the vitamin E that a human body needs. Vitamin E is an antioxidant, which protects the body’s fats and proteins from free radical damage. Canola oil can also help to reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer and memory loss. That apart, Canola has a high smoking point of 242°C. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized a qualified health claim for canola oil’s ability to reduce the risk of heart disease when used in place of saturated fat.

As a product directly related to health and nutrition segment, the growth in demand for Canola oil has been steady and mainly because of the

awareness among consumers to eat and stay healthy. “We are promoting the health benefits of Canola oil through various mediums to create a healthy society and spread out our reach of healthy products to the masses. Canola oil is growing market as consumers are becoming more aware about the necessity to stay fit and healthy. They need healthy cooking oil options in their kitchen and we have that product and we are promoting it in every possible way,” says **Raman Khanna, Director**, Eon Naturals Pvt. Ltd.

Eon Naturals is currently focused on Canola oil, but it shall be coming with a lot more imported category products in the next three



months. “Imported products are witnessing a higher acceptance in urban Indian pockets. The experimental nature of the shopper is an encouragement for importers and the formats offering imported & gourmet foods,” observes Khanna. The strongest markets for Eon Natural’s Canola oil are currently Delhi-NCR, Bangalore & Chennai. The company is right now focusing on metro cities, tier - 1 & tier - II cities and is tying up with more players in modern trade, general trade and online trade. “Modern trade and online trade in India are growing extensively. Sales from these newer formats have even surpassed general trade sales for the imported and gourmet food category. Currently, we have good sales in premium gourmet outlets such as Le Marche, Needs Supermart and many more. In online we have tie-ups with Bigbasket and Grocermax. We are planning to enter more modern trade chains for growing our market share and sales. Also, urban areas remain the target segment of our market,” points out Khanna.

**Queens Quinoa** is the largest producer of quinoa in India. Quinoa is a superfood, which can be enjoyed across all ages after the initial first year. Much has





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been said on the growth of health segment worldwide and India is fast catching up as evidenced by the growing demand for health foods like quinoa. The product is believed to be a complete source of protein, is gluten-free and helps in reducing diabetes, thereby becoming a strong contender for the third most important foodgrain in India.

Queens Quinoa has pioneered the commercial production of quinoa without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The company has put in place a processing facility that removes 100% Saponin. “We are looking after the production, processing, value-addition, marketing and awareness creation about quinoa. Our existing range of products includes quinoa grain, quinoa flour, gluten-free quinoa pasta and guilt-free quinoa chips. We have been developing new products category based out of quinoa, which is helping different category of users to start adopting quinoa in their lifestyle,” says **CA. Manish Goyal, Co-Founder, Queens Quinoa**, adding that quinoa grain is its best-selling product. Recently, the company introduced gluten-free fusilli pasta and guilt-free quinoa chips in two flavors – cream onion and chilli tomato. It will soon be coming up with affordable quinoa based ready-to-eat snacks to strengthen its retail outreach.

Quinoa is sold primarily through modern trade and online channels but for HoReCa sales, general trade is the preferred channel. “As on date, we are listed across all the metro specific modern trade and also pan-India based retailers where our sales are almost equally distributed,” says Goyal, while pointing out that the overall growth in quinoa (super grain) category has been more than 200% until recently and is likely to remain at least 50% yearly until the next 8-10 years. “As on date, the production of quinoa is hardly 0.1% of rice but is likely to reach at least 5% in the future.



**Quality is Pina’s key USP. We use the Freeze Drying technique, which is our patent technology to dry saffron. It keeps the aroma long lasting.**

— **Vipin Aggarwal**  
COO-India,  
Antonio Pina Diaz S.L.



“Our key markets are in the health segment – Gyms, weight-loss chains, wellness stores and hospitals. We are now working with influencers across the health segment to create awareness around the product and brand. We are targeting the 7% diabetic population and the 10% health-conscious segment for our future growth. We organize seminars and awareness creation campaigns across India, apart from making Queens Quinoa products available to consumers through various modes,” confides Goyal.

**Antonio Pina Diaz S.L** operates the Spanish saffron brand Pina. The ISO-3632 certified company and its importer arm in India – Indian Products Pvt Ltd. – are both engaged in saffron activity under BRC certification, which guarantees that there is no compromise in terms of the quality and purity of its saffron. “Quality is Pina’s key USP. We use the Freeze Drying technique, which is our patent technology to dry saffron. It keeps the aroma long lasting,” says **Vipin Aggarwal, COO-India**, Antonio Pina Diaz S.L. He says that the saffron market is very complicated in India. Due to adulteration, procuring pure saffron is a challenge. “Lots of inferior or adulterated saffron is available in the market and they cannot be compared with our product. We have no competition in terms of quality.” Most of the saffron brands in the market are not ISO certified. People use saffron very occasionally and that too for the purpose of demonstration only. Consumers, by and large, are not aware of the true benefits of saffron. “We are educating the people that saffron should be part of the kitchen. Without saffron our food is ‘incomplete’. Use saffron in your food and keep the doctor away,” says Vipin.

However, the scope for pure saffron is immense even though there is no such scope for new saffron products. “As we deal in only raw saffron, the scope for new products does not exist. At most, we can create new packs in terms of size only. Sometimes we do change our pack design so that the consumer



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ready-to-eat products, confectionery and breakfast category range. Our portfolio supports a total of 380 SKUs, which is a complete supermarket range,” says **Niraj Murarka, MD**, Mapleleaf Distribution Pvt. Ltd. The company counts Pantai as its strongest brand in India with Pantai sweet chilli sauces, curry paste, coconut milk & cream and rice vermicelli as top-sellers in its portfolio.

“Our experience in retail and wholesale trade and our association with the HoReCa industry gives us an edge in the international food category, which is the fastest growing segment in India,” says Murarka, pointing out that Mapleleaf’s competitive advantage lies in the fact that it has a complete range of Oriental cuisine products. “We are the top



gets a different look and feel of the product,” explains Vipin. But the encouraging thing for his company is that people are gradually becoming aware about the health benefits of saffron and buying the product more often. “There is scope for 100% growth. Our brand sales are increasing every year,” reveals Vipin “We are making consumers aware about the purity aspect of saffron. The results are encouraging as people are now gradually becoming very conscious about purity. Earlier, when people bought saffron, price was the key consideration. Now, when they buy it is the quality that plays on their mind. The consumer is today ready to pay if the product is pure. That is why 1 gm of Pina Supreme sells for an MRP of Rs. 1099, and it is the highest selling unit,” notes Vipin. Pina Supreme is also the company’s best-selling saffron category and is available at all gourmet shops and top F&G retailers pan-India. “Pina brand is available at METRO Cash & Carry, Big Bazaar, HyperCITY, Tesco, Q-Mart, Balaji Grand Bazar, Heritage, Modern Bazaar, Honey Money Top, Alfa, Le Marche, and at many more premium outlets. Gourmet shops are our key outlets but we are educating retailers to create this category for the general people as well,” discloses Vipin who is also looking to pharmacy stores for stocking saffron.

**Mapleleaf Distribution Pvt. Ltd.** has over 15 years of experience in retail and wholesale trade of international foods in India. The company is the sole distributor in India for a host of international brands – Cantina Mexicana, Pantai, Euro, Japanese Choice, Select, Lady Anna, Prung Keng, Manora, HowHow, Gogi, OHO, FOCO, Heritage, Tiparos, Sante, Healthyboy, and Star Lion. “We offer a wide range of Oriental, Mexican and Japanese cuisine apart from



most importers in India for products from Thailand and have about 14 Thai food companies in our fold for which we are the sole importers to India. We have the desire, passion and drive to be the No. 1 distributor of Asian & Mexican products imported into India. With a current turnover of USD 4 million, and a growth rate of 30% CAGR for the past year, we have set a target to achieve an annual growth of at least 30% per annum for the next five years,” avers Murarka.

Before introducing international products into the country, the company goes for a rigorous test marketing of products, often in tier II cities of India. “After test marketing the product, we import appropriate products from our international clients and then distribute them across the country through our network of wholesale, institutional and retail stockists, informs Murarka, saying that the company is targeting a turnover of USD 14 million from its distribution of imported products in India.

“  
**We offer a wide range of Oriental, Mexican and Japanese cuisine apart from ready-to-eat products, confectionery and breakfast category range. Our portfolio supports a total of 380 SKUs, which is a complete supermarket range.**

— **Niraj Murarka**  
 MD, Mapleleaf  
 Distribution Pvt. Ltd.

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**Challenges to growth**

Though the gourmet market is poised to grow owing to both demand and supply forces, there remains quite a few impediments in terms of availability of limited product, segment awareness, management of shrinkage, wastage and vendor management for proper product replenishment, limited product shelf life and restriction on import, to name a few. According to FIFT's Amit Lohani, the major challenges are high taxation, clearance issues at airports, and lack of adequate cold storage facilities. He says that India is still a land of stringent food laws, which makes it very difficult for international manufacturers to enter and sustain in the Indian market. Various ministries abide by various rules and regulations to ensure entry and availability of safe products for the consumers. So while India represents an attractive opportunity for imported food and drink, foreign companies must take heed of the particular challenges of the Indian market if they are to avoid potential pitfalls.

Another big challenge for foreign food companies is product placement and distribution. New brands entering the country need the right partners in the Indian market for distribution, followed by affordable placement. Without the right placement it is not possible to get started even in the first step of creating a market for the brand. The lack of proper distribution channels becomes all the more

glaring in cities like Guwahati, where there are very few distributors. Another major hurdle is the underdeveloped integrated cold chain framework in India. The huge demand and supply gap of support infrastructure acts as a constraint in the supply chain of imported goods.

Some retailers also feel that sourcing challenges need to be mitigated to spur the growth of imported food items, which are incompetent at times, and without any consistency. As a result, the end prices of imported food products (especially from Europe or USA) are much higher than its counterparts in the Indian market, which is due to high ocean freights, duties, etc. It is also extremely difficult for the importers to maintain the shelf life norm as per the rules. This results in prolonged non-availability of imported food products in India. Fluctuating exchange rates also put a huge pressure on the profitability of this business, and products go off the shelves due to blocking of such products by the importers. The good thing from the consumer point of view is that top retailers have been able to get their act together around many of problems. "We source our gourmet and international products from both distributors and importers depending on the nature of the product, shelf life and throughput. However, the interesting phenomenon that's happening in this space is the play of Indian FMCG companies, who are now bringing in lots of items into these categories," says Krishnan of SPAR.

It is expected that going ahead into the future many international manufacturers will be able to figure out the Indian market better and take their association with importers to more collaborative levels. "We firmly believe that the phenomenon of gourmet and international foods is going to change and become more democratic. We believe that doubling growth every few years should be very doable – across markets – whether tier 1 or tier II," says a confident Krishnan. All that the stakeholders must remember is that the opportunity areas in the future will revolve around direct sourcing, planting local bases, price betterment, introducing new products, and reaching the untapped markets. If these challenges can be addressed, then the sky is the limit for gourmet and imported food. In times to come, it will get even easier to put good-tasting, easy-to-prepare, nutritious, and internationally inspired food on the table. **PG**

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# what's next

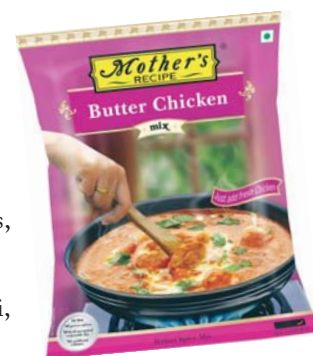


### ▲ Nutrient-rich supplements for good health

VRS Foods Ltd. has entered the sports and nutrition segment with its brand Proquest Nutrition. The range offers nine products, which includes supplements for muscle building, weight gain, pre-workout to post-workout supplements and meal replacement shakes. The supplements are enriched with milk whey protein, macronutrients, carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals and fibres. The supplements are a blend of probiotics from Ganeden USA, and are loaded with digestive enzymes.

### ► A savory twist of flavours

Mother's Recipe has come up with a new range of ready-to-cook delicacies and instant mixes to simplify cooking. The range offers a variety of authentic Indian recipes such as butter chicken, chicken moghalai, chicken tikka, chicken biryani, chicken nawabi and mutton curry, among others. These ready-to-cook dishes have no preservatives, no artificial colors, no MSG added. This range of mixes is available at select outlets of Pune, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Siliguri.



### ▼ Delightful raspberry yoghurt munchies

Loacker, marketed by United Distributors INC, has recently introduced Quadratini raspberry yoghurt wafers in the Indian market. The five layered wafer cubes are filled with raspberry yoghurt cream – made with 100 gm raspberries and fresh yoghurt – and has no added flavours. These munchies, which are ideal for a perfect snack, come in a pouch pack of 110 gm. The product is available at select retail outlets across the country.



### ◀ Ayurvedic care for monsoon

Leading personal care brand and hospitality supplier Biotique has come up with a new Bio Papaya exfoliating face wash meant for all skin types. This foaming gel is an ayurvedic blend of pure papaya extracts and other essential ingredients, which removes dead surface cells with a gentle refining action for a bright and clear skin. Available at all leading retail outlets and priced at Rs. 110 for 100 ml and Rs. 150 for a 150 ml pack.



### ▼ Potato crisps with international flavours

Opera from the house of Cremica Food Industries has added four new variants of kettle crisps to its existing range of potato crisps. Made with a twist of international flavors such as spicy barbecue, zesty wasabi, tangy chipotle, fiery sriracha, these premium Opera potato crisps are gluten-free and prepared in olive oil. These crisps come in distinctive color packs to represent each flavor, and are available at leading retail outlets. The product is priced Rs. 60 for a 60 gm pack.



### ▲ Organic salmons for Indian market

Big Sam's has recently added new Organic Salmon variant to its existing range of Norwegian Salmon. Loaded with the goodness of Omega-3, vitamins and proteins, these salmons are free from antibiotics and preservatives. What's more, the process of growing and processing of Big Sam's organic salmon is completely environment friendly.



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